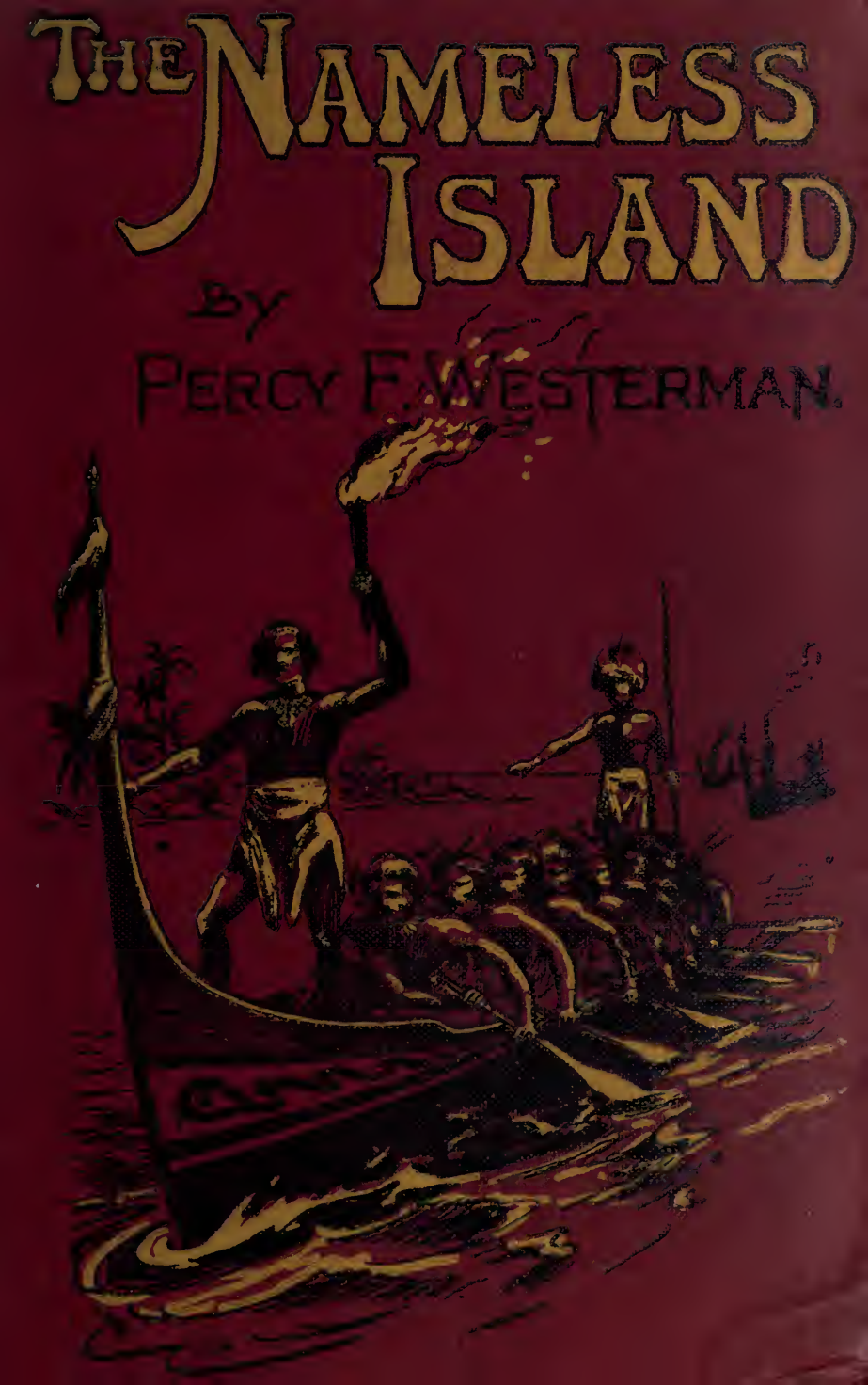
The Nameless Island

By

Percy F. Westerman.



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AMID THE CHEERS OF THE BAND OF BRITISHERS THE ENSIGN WAS BROKEN AT THE MASTHEAD

Frontispiece.

See page 68.

THE NAMELESS ISLAND

A Story of some Modern Robinson Crusoes

BY

PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Author of "The Young Cavalier," etc.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Hurricane	9
II.	Aground	21
III.	Abandoned	27
IV.	The Landing	36
V.	The Camp	44
VI.	The Animal that wouldn't be Rescued	51
VII.	The Emblem of Empire	58
VIII.	"A Sail!"	69
IX.	Unwelcome Visitors	76
X.	Strange Allies	85
XI.	The Frustrated Sacrifice	94
XII.	At Bay	102
XIII.	Ellerton to the Rescue	110
XIV.	Routing the Savages	120
XV.	A Knife-thrust in the Dark	127
XVI.	The Gale	135
XVII.	Back to the Island	144
XVIII.	A Surprise for the Invaders	153
XIX.	The Prisoner's Escape	162
XX.	The Enemy is Cornered	169

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXI.	The Buccaneers' Cave . . .	178
XXII.	The Treasure Chamber . . .	194
XXIII.	"A Sail! A Sail!" . . .	205
XXIV.	A False and a Real Alarm . .	213
XXV.	The Great Invasion . . .	220
XXVI.	A Great Disaster . . .	229
XXVII.	The Last Stand	238
XXVIII.	The Rescue	247

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Amid the cheers of the band of Britishers the ensign was broken at the masthead . . . . . *Frontispiece*

TO FACE PAGE

Ellerton was only just in time. Another dazzling flash enabled him to see the helpless form of the crippled seaman . . 17

Andy, finding the bull close to his heels, gripped a rope and swung himself into a position of comparative safety . . 55

The chief's canoe was paddled slowly towards the shore . . 103

Crash! fair in the centre of the lightly built fifty-feet hull struck the sharp stem 124

"A sail! a sail!" he exclaimed breathlessly . . . 210

A huge turtle had crawled across the beach and . . . had set the alarm bell ringing 219

With fierce shouts the savages tore down the path straight for the barricade 228

THE NAMELESS ISLAND

CHAPTER I

THE HURRICANE

THE *San Martin*, a single-screw cargo steamer of 3050 tons, was on her way from Realejo to Tahiti. Built on the Clyde twenty years back, this Peruvian-owned tramp was no longer in her prime. Since passing out of the hands of her British owners, neglect had lessened her speed, while the addition of various deck-houses, to suit the requirements of the South American firm under whose house-flag she sailed, had not increased her steadiness.

Captain Antonio Perez, who was in command, was a short, thick-set man of almost pure Spanish descent, swarthy, greasy, and vain—combining all the characteristics, good, bad, and indifferent, of the South American skipper. As part owner of the *San Martin* he was glad of the opportunity of adding to the vessel's earnings, so he had willingly agreed to take five passengers as far as Tahiti.

The five passengers were Mr. McKay, his son Andrew, Terence Donaghue, Fanshaw Ellerton, and Quexo; but before relating the circumstances in which they found themselves on board the *San Martin*, it will be necessary to introduce them to our readers.

Mr. McKay, a tall, erect Queenslander, of Scottish

descent, had, through the death of a near relative, migrated from Australia to one of the Central American republics in order to test the possibilities of an estate which had been left him, before putting it into the market.

Andrew McKay, or Andy, as he was called, was a well-set-up young fellow of nineteen, broad-shouldered and straight-limbed, with a fine head surmounted by a crop of auburn hair.

Terence Donaghue, the son of an Irish Canadian, was about Andy's age, and was on a visit to the McKays. He was impulsive both in manner and speech, high-spirited, and good-natured.

Fanshaw Ellerton, a lad of sixteen, was supposed to be serving his apprenticeship on board the *Tophet*, a barque of 2200 tons, of the port of Liverpool. He was in reality a deserter—but in circumstances beyond his control.

Taking advantage of general leave being granted to the crew of the *Tophet*, Ellerton had gone "up-country," and, before he actually realised it, he found himself besieged in Mr. McKay's ranch of San Eugenio.

One of those revolutions that occur in many of the South Central American states had broken out, and the rebels, thinking that Mr. McKay's house and estate would prove an easy and profitable prize, promptly attempted to take and plunder San Eugenio.

In spite of a vigorous defence, it seemed as if numbers would gain the day, till Quexo, a mulatto lad on the ranch, contrived to steal through the rebels' lines and bring timely aid, but not before Mr. McKay had been severely wounded.

But, so far as his Central American affairs were concerned, Mr. McKay was practically ruined, and he took steps to return to Queensland with the least possible delay.

Andy, of course, was to accompany him, while Terence arranged to go as far as Tahiti, whence he could take steamer to Honolulu and on to Victoria, British Columbia.

"Never mind, old chap," exclaimed Andy, when Ellerton made the startling yet not altogether unexpected discovery that the *Tophet* had sailed without him. "We've stuck together through thick and thin these last few days, and it seems as if we have been chums for years. I know the governor will be only too glad to have you with us, and no doubt you can pick up your ship at Sydney."

Nor did Mr. McKay forget Quexo's devotion; and, to the mulatto's great delight, he was engaged as servant at the—to him—princely salary of five dollars a month.

A fever-stricken coast was no place for a wounded man, hence Mr. McKay's anxiety to sail as soon as possible; and since ten days or more would elapse before one of the regular line of steamers left for Honolulu, passages were booked on the Peruvian tramp steamer *San Martin*.

. . . . . .

"What a scratch crew!" remarked Terence, pointing at the swarm of olive-featured Peruvians who were scrubbing down decks with the aid of the ship's hose.

"But even they have one advantage over most of the crews of the mercantile marine," replied Ellerton. "They are all of one nationality. Take the *Tophet's* crew—there are only eight British seamen before the mast; the rest are Germans, Finns, and Swedes."

"That is a crying scandal," interrupted Mr. McKay, who was resting in a deck-chair a few feet from the head of the poop-ladder. "England, the principal carrier of the world, has to rely upon foreigners to man her

merchant ships. And the reason is not far to seek," he added.

The *San Martin* was in the Doldrums. Not a ripple disturbed the surface of the ocean, save the white wake of the steamer as she pounded along at a steady nine knots. Overhead the sun shone fiercely in a cloudless sky.

"How deep is it here?" asked Terence, leaning over the rail.

"Do you know, Ellerton?" asked Mr. McKay.

"No, sir; I had no opportunity of examining a chart."

"It's approximately three thousand fathoms. Between the Galapagos and the Marquesas is a vast sunken plateau. Sunlight never penetrates these great depths; probably all is dark beyond two hundred fathoms."

"And are there fish or marine animals in the bed of the ocean?"

"No one knows. Possibly there are some marine animals capable of withstanding the enormous pressure, for it may be taken for granted that at three thousand fathoms the pressure per square inch is about three tons."

"Is it always calm in the Doldrums?" continued Terence, for he had never before "crossed the line."

"Often for weeks at a stretch. What's your experience of these, Ellerton?"

"Three weeks with the canvas hanging straight down from the yards. If you threw anything overboard it would be alongside for days. I can assure you, Terence, that I am jolly glad we're on board a steamer."

"How did you get out of it?" continued the young Canadian, eager for further information.

"By one of the frequent and sudden hurricanes that spring up in the belt of the calms; but even that was looked upon as a slice of luck."

Thus the days passed. Conversation was the chief means of passing the time, although the lads derived

considerable amusement from their efforts to teach Quexo English.

Reading was out of the question, for the ship's library consisted of only a few Spanish books of little interest to Mr. McKay and Andy, while to Terence and Ellerton they were unfathomable.

On the evening of the fourth day there was an ominous change in the weather.

The sun, setting between high-banked, ill-defined clouds, gave out bright copper-coloured rays that betokened much wind at no distant date ; while from the south-east a long, heavy swell, although far from land, gave further indications of change.

" How is the glass, Captain ? " asked Mr. McKay, as Captain Perez emerged from the companion and began to make his way for'ard to the bridge.

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

" Low, señor. I like it not."

" What an admission," exclaimed Mr. McKay, as the officer mounted the ladder. " Fancy a British skipper replying like that ! Here, Andy, you are not shaky on the pins like I am ; just present my compliments to Captain Perez and ask him to tell you how the barometer stands. I'm rather curious on that point."

" You appear to have a good knowledge of seamanship, sir," remarked Ellerton, as young McKay made his way to the bridge.

" Well, I must confess I have," admitted Mr. McKay. " Years ago I spent some months on a pearl-fisher in Torres Strait ; but that's a long story. Some day, perhaps, I'll tell you more about it."

" Seven hundred and forty millimetres—a fall of twenty-two millimetres in eight hours," announced Andy, reading the figures from a slip of paper, on which he had noted the captain's reply.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Mr. McKay. "That's equivalent to a trifle over 29·1 inches. We're in for something, especially with that deck cargo," as he pointed to the towering baulks of mahogany which were stowed amidships.

"Are they doing anything for'ard?" he continued.

"The men are placing additional lashings over the hatchways."

"Pity they didn't man the derrick and heave some of that stuff overboard," replied Mr. McKay, eyeing the timber with concern. "However, it will be dark in another quarter of an hour, so we had better turn in and get some sleep while we are able."

It was shortly after midnight when Ellerton awoke, conscious that something was amiss. He had slept through severe gales in the old *Tophet* when she was scudding under close-reefed canvas before the wind or lying hove-to in a hurricane in Magellan Straits; but there was something in the peculiar motion of the *San Martin* that roused his seaman's instincts.

It *was* blowing. He could hear the nerve-racking clank of the engines as the propeller raced in the air, and the corresponding jar as the ship's stern was engulfed in the following seas. That was a mere nothing; it was the excessive heel and slow recovery of the vessel which told him that things were not as they should be.

Hastily dressing, he was about to leave the cabin when a hollow groan caught his ear. It was pitch dark, for the electric lights had failed, and the after part of the ship was in a state of absolute blackness.

"What's up, Terence?"

Terence was like the sufferer on the Channel mail boat. He was past the stage when he was afraid he *might* die, and was entering into the stage when he was afraid he might *not*. Ellerton had suffered the agonies of

sea-sickness before, so, knowing that the unhappy victim would prefer to suffer in solitude, he went outside.

In the alley-way he collided with the second mate, who, clad in dripping oilskins, was returning from his watch on deck.

Ere the two could disengage, a heavy list sent them both rolling against one of the starboard cabins, and, at the same time, Andy, who, unable to sleep, was on the point of making his way over to Ellerton's berth, stepped upon the writhing forms and promptly joined them on the floor of the alley-way.

A number of choice expressions in English and Spanish, drowned by the thunder of the " combers " on deck, arose from the struggling trio, till at length Ellerton disentangled himself and succeeded in pulling his chum from under the form of the second mate.

" Isn't it awful, this gale ? " gasped Andy, whose right eye was rapidly closing from the effects of an accidental knock from the Peruvian's sea-boot.

" Yes, it's a bit thick," replied Ellerton, whose knuckles were bleeding through coming into contact with the brass tread of the cabin door. " But let's follow this chap up and get him to let us have a candle ; then we can see what we are doing."

As he spoke, a vivid flash of lightning revealed the Peruvian, still in his wet oilskins, stretched at full length on his bunk, his head buried in the blankets. He was in a state of absolute funk !

A swinging candlestick was affixed to the bulkhead, and Ellerton was soon able to procure a light. Andy glanced at the barometer. The mercury stood at 715 millimetres (28·15 in.)—a fall of nearly an inch since six o'clock on the previous evening.

" Can't we go on deck ? " asked Andy, as the *San*

Martin slowly recovered from a dangerous list. "It's rotten being cooped up here."

"You would stand a jolly good chance of being swept overboard," replied Ellerton. "Everything is battened down, and we can only get out by the sliding hatch communicating with the——"

His words were interrupted by a succession of heavy thuds, plainly audible above the roar of the wind and waves, while the shouts of the frantic seamen showed that something had broken adrift.

Taking advantage of the lift of the vessel as she threw her stern clear of a mountainous sea, Ellerton opened the steel sliding doorway sufficiently wide for the two chums to gain the poop. Staggering along the slippery, heaving deck, they reached the lee side of the deck-house, where, gripping the stout iron stanchion-rail, they awaited the next flash of lightning.

They had not long to wait. A brilliant, prolonged succession of flashes dazzled their eyes, the electric fluid playing on the wet planks and foam-swept waist of the plunging vessel.

The reason for the commotion was now apparent. One of the mainmast derricks had broken adrift, and, charging from side to side like a gigantic flail, had smashed the rail, crushed two steel ventilator-cowls, and utterly demolished two boats in the davits.

The crew, trying to secure the plunging mass of metal, were working with mad desperation, frequently up to their waists in water.

Two of the unfortunate men, crushed by the sweep of the derrick, had been hurled over the side, while another, his leg bent under him, lay helpless in the lee-scuppers, with only a few inches of broken bulwarks to prevent him from sharing the fate of his comrades.

"Stand by, Andy!" shouted Ellerton. "Take a

ELLERTON WAS ONLY JUST IN TIME. ANOTHER DAZZLING FLASH ENABLED HIM TO SEE THE HELPLESS FORM OF THE CRIPPLED SEAMAN

To face page 17.

couple of turns round this bollard," and throwing the end of a coil of signal-halliards to his friend, he made the other end fast round his waist and jumped down the poop-ladder.

He was only just in time. Another dazzling flash enabled him to see the helpless form of the crippled seaman, and as he wound his arms round the man's waist in an iron grip, a seething cataract of foam swept the deck.

The ship, stunned by the force of the gigantic billow, listed till her deck took an angle of 45 degrees, or more. To the young apprentice, held only by a single turn of the thin signal-halliard, it seemed as if the ship were already taking her downward plunge, for all round him surged the torrent of solid water, his position rendered doubly horrible by the intense blackness of the night.

Still he held on like grim death to the disabled seaman, the thin rope cutting into his breastbone like a steel wire. His feet were unable to find a hold ; the last fragment of the bulwarks had vanished, and only the rope held him and his burden from a prolonged death in the surging ocean.

Quivering like an aspen leaf, the stricken vessel slowly resumed an even keel, and then began the correspondingly sickening list to windward.

Another flash revealed the charging derrick whirlin over his head ; then, as he felt the rope slacken and himself slipping across the deck, his hand managed to grasp the foot of the poop-ladder.

Almost breathless by his exertions, and half suffocated through being so long under water, Ellerton retained sufficient presence of mind to clamber up the ladder, Andy assisting his burden by steadily and strongly hauling on the rope ; then, as the *San Martin* once more began her sickening roll to leeward, he sank exhausted

to the deck, safe under the lee of the deck-house, with the Peruvian still in his grip.

That last tremendous breaker had been the means of saving the ship, though at the time it had threatened to end her career. The dangerous deck-load of mahogany baulks had been wrenched from its securing lashings, and had been swept overboard; while the disabled derrick, coming into contact with the donkey-engine, had snapped off short.

At the same time the waves had swept four more of the crew to their last account, and the remainder, exhausted and disheartened by their misfortunes, had gained the shelter of the fo'c'sle.

Securing themselves by the rope, Andy and Ellerton—the latter having passed a bight round the now conscious and groaning seaman—hung on with desperation.

From their comparatively sheltered position they could gain occasional glimpses of the bridge, where Captain Perez, the first mate, and a couple of seamen stood braving the elements, their sou'-westers just visible above the top of the canvas storm-dodgers.

At one moment, silhouetted against the glare of the lightning, their heads could be seen against a background of wind-torn clouds; at another the vessel would be so deep in the trough of the waves that the crests ahead appeared to rise high above the rigid figures on their lofty, swaying perch.

"Will it hold?" shouted Andy above the hiss of the foam and the howling of the wind, as a few tons of water struck the weather side of the deck-house.

"I think so," replied Ellerton. "It would have gone before this if not."

"Then let's put the man inside. We can then go below and get the steward or some of the crew to look after him."

Accordingly they dragged the groaning seaman into the deck-house, and, wedging him up with cushions to prevent him from playing the part of Neptune's shuttlecock, they left him.

Seizing their opportunity, the two friends contrived to gain the saloon, where they found Mr. McKay, who had succeeded in procuring and lighting a pair of cabin-lamps.

"Thick, isn't it?" remarked Andy's father. Then: "What have you fellows been up to?" for both were wet to the skin, while Andy's eye was black and green, and Ellerton's forehead was bleeding from a superficial cut.

"Oh, nothing much," replied Ellerton modestly. "We were caught in the tail end of a comber. The deck cargo's gone, though."

"That's good news," replied Mr. McKay. "Though I fancy the worst is yet to come. I suppose Captain Perez is steering to the south'ard to try and avoid the main path of the hurricane?"

"I haven't had the chance of looking at the compass," replied Ellerton. "But I must go for'ard and get help for the poor fellow in the deck-house."

"What fellow is that?" asked Mr. McKay of his son as the apprentice disappeared along the darkened alleyway.

While Andy was relating with whole-hearted praise the story of his companion's bravery, Ellerton was feeling his way along the narrow, heaving passage that communicated with the fore part of the ship.

At length he came to the engine-room hatchway. Down below he could see the mass of complicated machinery throbbing in the yellow glimmer of the oil lamps, while the hot atmosphere was filled with a horrible odour of steam and burning oil.

Here, at any rate, the men were doing their duty right manfully, for he could see the engineers, gripping the

shiny rails as they leant over the swaying, vibrating engines, calmly oiling the bearings of the plunging rods and cranks. The "chief," his eyes fixed upon the indicators, was alertly awaiting the frequently recurring clank which denoted that the propeller was racing. For a few moments Ellerton stood there fascinated, the spectacle of an engine-room in a vessel in a storm was new to the lad, whose experience of the sea was confined to a sailing barque.

Suddenly above the monotonous clank of the piston-rods came a hideous grinding sound. The cylinders began to give out vast columns of steam, as the engines ran at terrifying speed.

Through the vapour Ellerton could discern the "chief," galvanised into extraordinary alertness, make a rush for a valve, while his assistants, shouting and gesticulating, dashed hither and thither amid the confined spaces between the quivering machinery.

The main shaft had broken, and the *San Martin* was helpless in the teeth of the hurricane.

CHAPTER II

AGROUND

For a brief instant Ellerton hesitated; ought he to return to his friends or make his way for'ard? The *San Martin*, losing steerage way, was rolling horribly in the trough of the sea; any instant she might turn turtle.

There was a rush of terrified firemen from the grim inferno of the stokeholds; the engineers, having taken necessary precautions against an explosion of the boilers, hastened to follow their example, scrambling in a struggling mass between the narrow opening of the partially closed hatchway.

Clearly Ellerton had no means of gaining the deck in the rear of that human press; so lurching and staggering along the alley-way he made his way aft, where he met Mr. McKay, who, assisted by Andy, was about to go on deck. Terence, looking a picture of utter misery in the yellow light of the saloon, and Quexo, his olive skin ashy grey with fear, had already joined the others.

"Come on, Hoppy," shouted Andy cheerfully. "Give me a hand with the governor. Terence, you had better stay here."

Carefully watching their chance, the two lads managed to help Mr. McKay to the shelter of the poop deck-house, and they were about to return for Donaghue and the mulatto when they encountered Captain Perez and the first mate. Both were in a state bordering on frenzy, the

captain rolling his eyes and calling for the protection of a thousand saints, while the mate was mumbling mechanically the last compass course, "*Sur oeste, cuarto oeste*" (S.W. by W.).

The cowardly officers had deserted their posts!

In an instant Fanshaw Ellerton saw his chance—and took it.

"Stop him, Andy!" he shouted, setting the example by throwing himself upon the Peruvian skipper.

The man did not resist; he seemed incapable of doing anything.

"Don't bother about the other," hissed the apprentice. "Make this chap come with us to the bridge. I'll be the skipper and he'll be the figurehead."

The two chums dragged the captain across the heaving deck, up the swaying monkey-ladder, and gained the lofty bridge.

Ellerton glanced to windward. His seamanship, poor though it was, began to assert itself. The wind was going down slightly, but, veering to the nor'ard, was causing a horrible jumble of cross-seas—not so lofty as the mountainous waves a few hours ago, but infinitely more trying.

The *San Martin*, swept on bow, quarter, and broadside, rolled and pitched, the white cascades pouring from her storm-washed decks; yet Ellerton realised that she possessed a considerable amount of buoyancy by the way she shook herself clear of the tons of water that poured across her.

The wheel was deserted. The steersman, finding that his officers had fled and that the vessel carried no way, had followed his superior's example.

Cowering under the lee of the funnel casing were about twelve of the crew, including the bo'sun and quartermaster.

"Tell the captain," yelled Ellerton to his chum, "to order those men to set the storm staysail, if they value their hides."

Andy interpreted the order, which the captain, gaining a faint suspicion of confidence, communicated to the bo'sun.

The bare chance of saving their lives urged the men into action. Unharmed, they succeeded in gaining the fo'c'sle, and in less than ten minutes the stiff canvas was straining on the forestay.

Gathering way, the *San Martin*, no longer rolling, pounded sluggishly through the foam-flecked sea.

Ellerton would not risk setting any canvas aft; he was content to let the vessel drive.

"Ask him whether we have plenty of sea room—whether there is any danger of running ashore during the next hour or so?"

Andy put the question.

"No, señor; there is plenty of sea room."

That was enough. The apprentice cared not what course he steered, so long as he kept the waves well on the quarter. When the hurricane was over they could carry on till they fell in with some passing vessel and got a tow into port.

"That's right. Tell him to take his watch below," continued the apprentice. "And you might get hold of some oilskins, Andy."

Obediently the skipper left the bridge, and, steeling himself for a long trick at the helm, Ellerton grasped the spokes of the wheel with firm hands.

At length the day broke, and with it a regular deluge of rain, pouring from an unbroken mass of scudding, deep blue clouds. The rain beat down the vicious crests, but the sea still ran "mountains high."

About noon Mr. McKay expressed his intention of

joining Ellerton on the bridge, and assisted by his son he left the shelter of the poop.

From the foot of the poop-ladder to that of the bridge a life-line had been rigged to give the protection that the shattered bulwarks no longer afforded.

When midway between the two ladders, a roll of the vessel caused Mr. McKay to lurch heavily towards the rope. His wounded limb proved unequal to the strain, and falling heavily upon the main rope his weight broke the lashings that held it to the ring-bolt. Before Andy could save him, Mr. McKay had crashed against the main hatchway.

"Hurt?" asked Andy anxiously.

"I'm afraid so," replied his father, manfully suppressing a groan. "My leg is broken."

By dint of considerable exertion the sufferer was taken back to the saloon, and the ship's surgeon, who had been routed out of his cabin, pronounced the injury to be a double fracture.

Ellerton, his whole attention fixed upon keeping the vessel on her course, had neither observed nor heard the noise of the accident, and great was his concern when Andy mounted the bridge and informed him of the catastrophe.

"I think I can leave the command," he remarked. "No doubt that yellow-skinned johnny has recovered his nerve by now."

Five minutes later Captain Antonio Perez gained the bridge. He had lost his suave, self-confident manner, and his general appearance showed a change for the better in his moral and physical condition. Yet, without a word of thanks to the English lad who had saved the situation, he called up two of the seamen, and placed them at the wheel.

"He might have been a bit civil over the business," remarked Andy.

"Poor brute! I dare say he feels his position pretty acutely. I only hope he won't break down in a hurry," replied Ellerton.

For the next two days the *San Martin* fled before the storm, the trysail keeping her steady and checking any tendency to broach-to. The wind had increased to almost its former violence on the evening of the first day, but the vessel was then close on the outer edge of the storm-path.

Mr. McKay, who was suffering considerably, bore his injuries gamely, while Terence, who had recovered from his bout of sea-sickness, began to take a new interest in life. Quexo, however, still lay on the floor of the state-room, refusing to eat or drink, and groaning dismally at intervals.

"I reckon he's sorry he followed the Americanos across the wide river that tastes of salt," said Terence, quoting the Nicaraguan way of speaking of the sea. "Even I can feel sorry for him."

"That's a good sign," remarked Andy. "Yesterday you hadn't the pluck to feel sorry for yourself."

On the morning of the fourth day of the storm the wind piped down considerably, and the Peruvian captain ordered the fore and aft canvas to be set. The engine-room staff also began to take steps to attempt the temporary repairing of the shafting, and had already removed a considerable portion of the plating of the tunnel.

As yet the sky was completely overcast. At noon the officers, sextant in hand, waited in vain for an opportunity of "shooting the sun." Where the ship was, no one on board knew, though it was agreed that she was driven several miles to the south'ard of her proper course.

The weather began to improve as night drew on. The setting sun was just visible in a patch of purple sky,

showing that fine weather might be expected from that quarter. The glass, too, was rising; not rapidly, but gradually and surely.

"Now for a good night's rest," exclaimed Andy, for throughout the gale the lads had turned in "all standing."

But Andy was doomed to be disappointed, for at four bells in the middle watch (2 a.m.) a sudden crash roused the sleepers from their berths. The *San Martin* was hard and fast aground.

CHAPTER III

ABANDONED

HASTILY assuring the helpless Mr. McKay that they would soon return and tell him how things really stood, the three lads rushed on deck.

It needed no seaman's instinct to tell that the *San Martin* was doomed. Scudding before the lessening gale, she had been lifted on the crest of a huge roller and dropped fairly on the rocks. Her forward part, trembling under the tremendous blows of the waves, was hard and fast aground, while her after part, lifting to the heave of the ocean, assisted, like a gigantic lever, in the destruction of her bows.

Above the roar of the waves, the howling of the wind, and the shattering of iron plates, arose the frantic shouts of the crew.

Already demoralised by their trying experiences in the gale, the last vestiges of discipline had vanished. In the darkness, for now no favouring lightning flash came to throw a light upon the scene, the Peruvian crew rushed madly for the boats, fighting, cursing, entreating, and imploring the saints.

For'ard a succession of rapid cracks, as the trysail, having burst its sheets, was flogging itself to ribbons, added to the din, till the foremast, buckling close to the deck, crashed over the side.

"Come on," shouted Andy, and even then his voice

sounded faint in the midst of the terrifying uproar, "let's get the pater on deck."

Ellerton shook his head.

"Better stop where he is. What chance do you think these fellows will have?" and he pointed to the struggling mass of frenzied seamen as they clambered into the boats.

Already the cutter, still in the davits, was crowded, the men striving to swing her clear with oars and stretchers, while others were scrambling up the boat ladders.

Round swung the foremost davit. The men who had already climbed into her began to lower away the boat-falls. A sudden lurch sent the cutter, already at a dangerous angle, crashing into the ship's side. The lower block of the foremost fall became disentangled, and, amidst a chorus of shrieks, the boat swung stern in the air, shooting its human freight into the surging waters.

The next instant a huge wave dashed the swaying cutter into matchwood, the wind drowning the death shouts of a score of hapless victims.

Heedless of the fate of their comrades, the remainder of the crew made a headlong rush for one of the quarter boats. Being more to lee'ard, for the *San Martin* had struck with the wind on her starboard quarter, this boat seemed to stand little chance.

Ellerton could hear the captain's voice, urging the men to swing the boat clear. The apprentice sprang towards the falls.

"You are not going to throw away your life, are you?" shouted Andy, grasping him by the shoulder.

"No; but I'm going to give those fellows a chance. Stand by that rope, take a turn round that cleat, and lower when I give the word."

The last of the Peruvian seamen had scrambled into the boat. Not one of these cared who was left; all that

they knew was that a few remained to man the falls, but in the darkness they were unaware that it was the British lads who stayed to help them.

"Lower!" yelled Ellerton.

Swiftly the ropes ran through the blocks. The crest of a wave received the frail boat, and, more by luck than by good management, the seamen contrived to disengage the falls. Then the oars splashed, and the next instant the boat was lost to sight in the darkness.

For a brief instant the chums stood in silence, grasping one of the now burdenless davits. They were alone—a crippled man, three lads, and a native boy—upon an abandoned vessel that threatened every moment to part amidships.

Where they were they had no possible knowledge. The ship was aground, but whether on an isolated rock, or, what was more than likely, upon the edge of an encircling reef, they knew not. They must wait till daylight—if they were fated to see the dawn of another day—but they were determined that the anxious period of waiting should not be passed in idleness.

Returning to the cabin where Mr. McKay was lying in suspense, awaiting news of their hazardous position, the lads briefly explained what had happened during their absence on deck.

"We must hope for the best," observed the invalid. "And, after that, we stand a better chance than those in the boat. Even if those poor fellows escape being dashed to death upon a rock-bound shore, or being engulfed in the waves, they'll have a terrible time. No water or provisions, no compass—a thousand tortures before they reach land or are picked up by a passing craft."

"I think the seas are getting less heavy," said Andy. "Is it because the tide is falling?"

"The tide may have something to do with it," replied Mr. McKay; "though the rise and fall is barely four feet."

"Our stern seems to be settling," said Ellerton. "The ship doesn't appear quite so lively."

"That may be because the water is pouring into the after-hold," remarked Andy.

"In that case the vessel is settling on the bottom; otherwise she would sink. That's another point in our favour, and it often happens that there is deep water close to the reef," said the apprentice. "But let's to work. Terence, you know where the steward's pantry is. Take a lamp and fetch up as much stuff as you can carry. Andy, will you please take Quexo with you and bring up a couple of barricoes of water?"

While they were thus engaged, Ellerton collected five lifebelts, one of which he proceeded to fasten round Mr. McKay's body.

"We may want them, sir; but, on the other hand, we may not. In any case, if there is an island under our lee we had better wear these, especially if we have to land through the surf."

"I fancy I shall have some difficulty in getting through the surf," replied Mr. McKay with a grim smile.

"Never fear, sir; we'll pull you through," was the determined assurance.

Presently Andy and the mulatto returned, having found and secured a supply of the precious fluid.

"The fore-hold and the engine-room are flooded," reported the former, "and I think there's a hole on the starboard quarter. But I believe there's some of the crew up for'ard—I heard them groaning."

"Let's go and see," replied Ellerton, buckling on a lifebelt and picking up a lantern.

"Be careful, lads," cautioned Mr. McKay.

"Trust us," answered Andy, likewise putting on a belt. "We need not wait for Terence."

"Why, it's not half so rough," he continued as they gained the deck, which had settled to a list of less than ten degrees, and no longer lifted as the rollers swept past. "See, very few of the waves break over the ship."

"It's a bad job those cowardly beggars pushed off," replied Ellerton. "They would have done better to have waited. But listen!"

Above the moaning of the wind came the unmistakable sound of a groan.

"It's down there," exclaimed Andy, pointing to a battened-down hatchway.

"There's no harm in opening it now," replied his companion, casting off the lashings and unbolting the heavy iron slide. "Now, then, down you go."

Andy, holding the lantern well behind his head, slowly descended, but at two steps from the bottom of the ladder his feet encountered water. At the same time a deafening bellow echoed in the confined space.

"Great snakes!" he exclaimed, "it's an ox!"

"Poor brute, it's nearly drowned, and half starved into the bargain. And here is a pen full of sheep. I wonder where they keep the fodder?"

"Here's some pressed hay," announced Andy after a short examination. "And I don't think the salt water has touched it."

"Throw some down in that corner," continued his companion, pointing to a part of the flat that the sea, by reason of the ship's list, had not reached. "We'll let the brutes loose; they can't do much damage."

"Now set to, lads," exclaimed Mr. McKay, when they returned to the saloon, and found Terence with a regular store of provisions—the loot of the steward's pantry.

"Make a good meal, for our future movements are uncertain."

"It will be light in another hour," remarked Andy.

"And the sea's going down," chimed in the apprentice.

"And our spirits are rising," added Terence.

"You speak for yourself, Terry, my boy," replied Andy, laughing. "Your spirits were low enough a few days ago."

All hands set to with a will, for even Quexo had recovered his former appetite.

"This storm has lasted longer than usual," remarked Mr. McKay. "It was of more than ordinary severity. Still, I've known similar instances, and within three hours of the height of the hurricane the wind has died away to a flat calm."

"Then we shall be able to take to the boat almost immediately after daylight."

"Is there one left?"

"Two. I think one is stove in, but the other seems sound."

"A long voyage in an open boat on the ocean is no light matter," replied Mr. McKay. "If we were in the latitude of the Trades the task would be easier; but here we are, I imagine, in a zone of calms alternating with violent hurricanes. The best thing we can do is to land on the island—if we are near one, as I firmly believe is the case—and bring ashore as many of the ship's stores as we can. Then, if not sighted by any passing craft, we can set to work and deck in one of the boats, provision her, and shape a course for the nearest trading station. By the time the boat is ready I trust I shall be firmer on my feet."

"Do you hear that, Quexo?" asked Andy. "You may be ashore in a few hours."

Quexo grinned approvingly. He had had enough of the sea.

"Don't build up his hopes too high," continued Mr. McKay. "Even if the weather continues fine, it may be days before we can effect a landing."

"Why?"

"Because after these hurricanes, although the open sea is comparatively calm, a heavy ground swell sets in on shore. A boat would certainly be capsized, unless there happens to be a shelter formed by a barrier reef of coral. But now, up on deck. It will be daylight in less than ten minutes."

Eagerly the lads ran up the companion, and what a sight met their gaze as the tropical day quickly mastered the long hours of darkness!

The *San Martin* lay on the outer edge of a long, level reef of coral, against which the surf still hammered, throwing up clouds of white spray.

Less than fifty yards from the port quarter was a gap in the barrier, giving entrance to the lagoon. The doomed ship had missed the opening by half her own length.

She lay with her bows pointed diagonally towards the reef. Her funnel and foremast had gone by the board, while she showed unmistakable signs of breaking in two, for her bow and stern had "sagged" till amidships her port side was flush with the water, while, correspondingly, her starboard side, owing to the ship's list, was but five feet higher.

But it was neither the ship nor the reef that attracted the castaways' attention. Barely a quarter of a mile away was an island, rugged and precipitous, the highest point towering a thousand feet above the level of the ocean.

In several places the ground sloped towards the sea, the valley being thickly covered with luxuriant foliage, while for a distance of nearly a mile was a strand of dazzling whiteness, upon which the sheltered waters of the lagoon lapped as gently as the ripples of a mill pond

in a summer's breeze. Elsewhere, so far as could be seen, the rocks rose sheer from the sea.

"Any sign of the boat?" asked Andy.

"No; but I'll get a glass," replied Ellerton, and swarming up the stanchion of the bridge—for the ladder had been swept away—he gained the chart-house.

From his elevated position he swept the shore with the telescope, but no trace of the boat was to be seen. Neither, so far as he could judge, was the island inhabited.

On rejoining his comrades, the young apprentice next directed his attention to the two remaining boats. One, a gig, was, as he had surmised, stove in, three of the planks being shattered. For the time being she was useless, though, he reflected, she might be patched up at some future date.

The other, a 23-ft. cutter, was still secured to the boat-booms, and was practically uninjured. Her size and weight would, he knew, be a severe drawback when the time came to hoist her outboard.

"I vote we bring your pater up on deck, Andy," said he. "We must have him out of the saloon sooner or later. The sooner the better, I think, because he can, if we place him on a pile of cushions close to the break of the poop, direct operations."

It was a long and tedious task. Mr. McKay was no featherweight, and his injured limb had to be carefully handled. Moreover, the companion ladder was steep and narrow.

At length Ellerton solved the difficulty by procuring one of the men's mess tables, nailing a strut to one end, against which the victim steadied himself by his sound leg while he was stretched at full length on the board. On this improvised sleigh four pairs of strong arms dragged the patient up the steep stairway and on to the poop deck.

"What do you think of that, sir?" asked Ellerton, pointing to the island of refuge. "Isn't it superb?"

"It is," assented Mr. McKay. "I hope we'll find it so, for we will have to throw ourselves upon its hospitality for a few weeks."

"Do you know its name, sir?" continued the apprentice.

"No; has it one?" was the astonished reply.

"The Nameless Island," announced Ellerton. "Now, lads, three cheers for the Nameless Island!"

CHAPTER IV

THE LANDING

THIS burst of high spirits showed how light-hearted the castaways were in the face of difficulties, for what lay before them and how they were to reach the island required all their powers of thought and action.

"How do you propose to get the cutter over the side?" asked Mr. McKay.

"By means of one of the derricks," replied Ellerton promptly.

"Quite so; but where is the power required to turn the winches to come from? We've no steam at our command, you know, and these winches are not adapted to manual power."

The apprentice's face clouded; he thought for a few minutes, then—

"We can top one of the derricks and rig up a tackle, sir."

"Good!" replied Mr. McKay. "But what is the weight of the boat?"

"Ours on the *Tophet* weighed twelve hundredweight; this one is about the same size."

"Then rig a gun tackle, and the four of you will manage the job, I think."

Accordingly two large double blocks were obtained and the rope rove ready for use. One of the blocks was secured to the end of the derrick, which was then hoisted to an

angle of about forty-five degrees. This took time, but at length everything was ready for the crucial test.

"Now, all together!"

The three lads and the mulatto tailed on to the rope. The blocks squeaked as the strain began to tell; the cutter began to lift, then—crash!

Flat on their backs fell the four lads; high in the air jerked the disengaged lower block. The slings to which it had been fastened had snapped.

Slowly the victims regained their feet, Andy rubbing a tender portion of his anatomy, Terence gasping for breath, for Andy's head had well-nigh winded him. Ellerton was clapping his hands to a rapidly rising bump on the back of his head, while Quexo, whose skull was as hard as iron, was hopping all over the deck, rubbing his shins, that had saved the apprentice's head at the mulatto's expense.

"Try again, boys!" shouted Andy. "Everything on board this blessed craft seems rotten!"

A new span was placed in position, and the tackle again manned, and this time their efforts were crowned with success. The cutter rose slowly in the air, till it hung fire five feet above the shattered bulwarks.

"Belay, there! Man the guy-rope!"

The derrick swung outboard, till the cutter was poised above the water and well clear of the sloping sides of the hull.

"Lower away handsomely."

Slowly the boat dipped, till at length she rode, sheltered under the lee of her stranded parent, upon the bosom of the ocean.

"Capital!" exclaimed Mr. McKay, as his son swarmed down the rope, disengaged the tackle, and allowed the cutter a generous length of painter.

Then the work of loading her was begun. It was

decided that for the first trip nothing more than was absolutely necessary for immediate use was to be taken, until it was settled where their camp was to be fixed, and whether the island had any inhabitants.

"A small barrico of water will be sufficient, though I am certain there are springs amongst those trees," said Ellerton. His sense of responsibility was hourly increasing. "A barrel of flour, some tinned goods, canvas and rope for a tent."

"Not forgetting hatchets, knives, and firearms," added Mr. McKay.

"Firearms ? "

"Aye ; one never knows how the natives—if there be natives on the island—will greet us. Most of the Pacific Islanders are fairly peaceable, thanks to missionary enterprise and the fear of a visit from a warship ; yet cannibalism still exists. I have known instances of the crews of small 'pearlers' being treacherously surprised, killed, and eaten. So get hold of the arms ; you'll probably find the key of the captain's cabin in the chart-house ; if not, burst open the door."

Ellerton departed upon his errand, and presently returned with the news that there was no trace of the key. "Here is a sextant and a bundle of charts, however," he added. "They are bound to be useful, although I cannot understand the meaning of the depths on the chart."

"They are in 'brazas,' equal to about five and a half English feet. But, as you say, the charts will be of extreme importance to us."

"Come on, Terence, let's burgle the captain's cabin," exclaimed Ellerton, laying hold of a hatchet.

Soon the sound of blows was heard, followed by the splintering of wood, and the two lads returned literally armed to the teeth.

Each had a couple of rifles slung across his back; Terence carried half a dozen revolvers in his arms and a sheath-knife between his teeth, while Ellerton staggered beneath the weight of several belts of ball cartridges and a box of revolver ammunition.

"There's more to come; the place is like a regular armoury," explained Terence.

"That's somewhat unusual," replied Mr. McKay. "Most captains keep firearms of a kind in their cabins. I strongly suspect that those arms were to be sold to some South American insurgents. They are much too good for bartering with the South Sea Islanders. Nevertheless, I'm right glad we have been able to arm ourselves thoroughly, as I expected we should have to be content with a couple of pistols between the lot of us."

The work of loading the boat proceeded briskly, till the strictly limited quantity of gear was carefully stowed under the thwarts. Then came the question, how were they going to transport the crippled Mr. McKay to the shore?

"Hoist me over by the derrick, of course," replied he. "A couple of rope spans round the plank and their bights slipped over the hook of the lower block, and the trick's done."

Ellerton and Terence thereupon slipped down a rope into the boat and carefully guided the swaying mess table and its helpless burden on to a couple of the after thwarts. This done, they were joined by Andy and Quexo, and, shipping the heavy ash oars, they pulled clear of the ship.

The first fifty yards meant hard and careful rowing, for directly they were beyond the shelter of the stranded vessel they felt the full force of the rollers as they dashed against the coral reef, barely a boat's length to lee'ard.

Once, indeed, it seemed as if the cutter were bound to be swept upon the rocks; but by dint of the utmost

exertions of her crew, the boat surely and slowly drew away from the influence of the rollers.

"My word, that was a narrow squeak!" exclaimed Andy, wiping his face, from which the perspiration ran freely. "I thought we were going to be capsized that time."

"It doesn't say much for the chances of those poor fellows last night," replied Ellerton. "They must have dropped smack on top of the reef."

"We'll soon find out," said Mr. McKay. "You see, they were immediately to lee'ard of the ship, and it was high water at the time. If they survived, we'll find them ashore right enough."

"But I saw no sign of the boat when I looked through the glass."

"That may be because there is a creek or cove that is invisible from the ship. Being directly to wind'ard, we are bound to find either the men or the remains of the boat."

"The ship is sitting up well," remarked Andy, for, the tide having dropped nearly six feet—it had been abnormally high by reason of the terrific wind—they could see the top of one of her propeller blades. "Do you think she'll stay there?"

"It certainly doesn't seem as if she is likely to slip off into deep water, but we cannot say for certain. The first fine day there's little or no swell we'll sound all round her. Now, give way, lads."

The rowers resumed their oars, and the boat, passing through the narrow gap in the reef, gained the shelter of the lagoon.

"Fine, isn't it?" exclaimed Terence enthusiastically, as he rested on his oar and gazed into the clear depths of the tranquil water. "Won't we be able to have some bathes?"

"You'll have to be careful if you do," remarked Mr. McKay. "There are bound to be sharks about."

He did not think it advisable to call the lads' attention to a commotion in the water a few hundred yards in front of the boat. From his inclined position he could see ahead, while the rowers had their backs turned in that direction. His keen eyes had detected the sinister dorsal fin of not one, but many sharks, all cutting towards one spot. There could be but little doubt of the fate of the Peruvian seamen.

The noise of the approaching oars disturbed the huge monsters, and they darted off to the shelter of the rock-strewn floor of the lagoon.

Unaware of the tragedy, the lads urged the boat almost over the fatal spot, and five minutes later the cutter's forefoot grounded on the sandy beach.

"Terence, I want you and Quexo to stay in the boat," said Ellerton, after the survivors had, by a common impulse, knelt down and returned thanks to Divine Providence for their escape. "Keep her stern from slewing round, so that we can push off in a hurry. Andy and I are going to explore."

And, buckling on a revolver and an ammunition belt, and grasping a rifle in his hand, Ellerton took a flying leap over the bows and alighted on the sand.

The lads found themselves on the shore of a small bay, its extremities bounded by two towering cliffs, that rose sheer from the lagoon. That to the left was not less than five hundred feet in height, while the other was but slightly lower. Midway between these impassable boundaries the land sloped abruptly to the beach, and was thickly covered with cocoanut palms.

"Keep your weather eye lifting, Andy," cautioned Ellerton, who had taken the precaution of charging both the magazine of his rifle and the chambers of his revolver.

It was an unnecessary warning, for Andy was an infinitely better scout than his companion; still, it showed that Ellerton was fast adopting the manner of life required in a wild and unsettled country.

Skirting the edge of the wood, the lads kept a vigilant look-out for any traces of human agency, but nothing was visible.

Presently they came to a small stream, which, trickling down the steep hillside, was lost in the sand.

"There'll be no lack of fresh water," exclaimed Andy thankfully, for he knew the value of that precious fluid. "But, I say, isn't everything quiet?" For, save the babbling of the brook and the distant roar of the breakers on the reef, there was an unaccustomed silence. Not a bird sang in the groves, not an animal rustled the thick undergrowth.

"I think we may take it for granted that the island is uninhabited—at least, this part," said Andy, as they completed their walk along the shores of the bay. "Otherwise, there's almost sure to be a beaten track to the shore."

"It doesn't promise much for the boat's crew," answered Ellerton. Then, with an exclamation of surprise, he shouted: "Look! What's that?"

Lying on the sand a few feet from the water's edge was a mournful relic of the unfortunate boat, her back-board bearing the words *San Martin*. A little farther they found an oar.

"There were two boats, remember," said Ellerton. "And one we know was capsized."

"I vote we explore the next bay," exclaimed Andy. "There's no suitable clearing here for a camp, and felling trees takes time; so let's get back to the boat."

"Well?" asked Mr. McKay on their return.

"We must push off and land on the other side of the

cliff," said his son. "There may be a better site for our tent. It's too steep and densely wooded here."

"Any signs of the crew?"

"Only part of their boat."

"I feared as much," replied Mr. McKay.

. . . . . .

"This looks more promising," exclaimed Andy enthusiastically, as the boat slowly rounded the northernmost of the two cliffs.

Here the land sloped less abruptly towards the lagoon, while in places there were terraces almost bare of trees. In the background towered a range of mountains whose rugged sides gave the appearance of being unclimbable, while on either hand of the bay rose lofty cliffs.

The beach, too, was better adapted for landing purposes than where they had first touched, consisting of sand interspersed by ledges of rocks jutting seawards, thus forming convenient natural jetties.

"This will do admirably," said Ellerton, pointing to a narrow cove betwixt the ledges. "There's sand at its head, so there's no fear of the boat being damaged."

CHAPTER V

THE CAMP

SLOWLY the cutter was backed in till its sternpost stuck on the smooth, even bottom.

The castaways could not have chosen a better harbour. On either hand the rocks, smooth and flat-topped, allowed a boat to be moored alongside without danger of being left high and dry at low water, while the ledge shelved so gradually that it was possible to bring the boat's gunwale level with the natural pier at any state of the tide.

"I think we had better make a tour of exploration as we did before," said Andy. "Not that I think this part of the island is inhabited any more than yonder bay."

"Say, Andy," exclaimed Terence, "isn't it about time I had a spell ashore ?"

"All right, Terence," replied Ellerton. "You go with Andy and take Quexo ; I'll stay with Mr. McKay."

"Thanks, Hoppy," replied Terence, and without further ado he jumped ashore.

"Here, take this rope and make her stern fast before you go," said Ellerton. "And you, Andy, stand by with the painter."

"Where shall I make fast to ?" asked Terence. "This rock is as smooth as a table."

"See if there's a lump of rock on the other side."

Terence crossed the landing-place, holding the rope's-end in his hand. Suddenly he shouted :

"Come here, you fellows! Here's a boat!"

There was a rush to where Terence stood, while even Mr. McKay raised himself on his elbow, eager to hear the news.

Lying bottom upwards on the sandy shore was the ill-fated boat in which the last of the crew attempted to reach the shore. Her bows were considerably damaged, while amidships a portion of her keel and both garboards had been stove in, leaving a jagged hole nearly two feet in diameter.

Four or five oars lay on the shore within a few feet of the boat, but there were no signs of the hapless crew; the sand above high-water mark was innocent of foot-prints.

"They are drowned, sure enough," said Andy sadly.

Alas! though they did not know it, the fate of the crew was far more terrible. Holed on the outer reef, the boat, rapidly filling, had been swept into the lagoon, where the waves, though high, were not so terrific as outside the coral barrier.

Well it was that the watchers on the wreck heard not the awful shrieks as the sharks fought for and seized their helpless prey.

Ellerton returned to the cutter to inform Mr. McKay of their discovery, while the others set off to explore.

In less than an hour they were back, and reported that there were no signs of human habitation, although the shore was strewn with the remains of the first boat that left the wreck, including most of the oars, gratings, also a quantity of timber, presumably from the shattered decks of the *San Martin*.

"But we've found a fine place to pitch the tent," continued Andy. "You see the second terrace? Well, at the extreme right is a steep ravine. The other two sides are enclosed by a wall of rock, while on this side there

is a natural path, although you can't distinguish it from where we are."

"That sounds all right," said his father. "But how are we to get the gear up there—including the useless lump of animated clay in the shape of myself?"

"I hadn't thought of that," replied Andy.

"We must find a more convenient spot at first," continued Mr. McKay. "Then, when we have landed all the gear from the ship that we can possibly manage to move, we can devise some means of setting up a more substantial dwelling on the terrace you mention. Now, if you will please carry me ashore, you can proceed to unload the boat."

In spite of the adaptable jetty, the work of getting Mr. McKay—crippled as he was—on shore was no easy task. The patient bore the discomfort gamely, uttering a heartfelt sigh of relief as the lads set the improvised stretcher down in the shade of a thin grove of cocoanut palms.

"How far away is the stream—I think you mentioned there was a stream in the bay?" asked Ellerton.

"Less than a hundred yards away. It's very clean, but not so full as the one we found," replied Andy.

"Then let's set up the tent. This place will do for a day or two at least."

The chosen site consisted of soft springy turf, sloping very gradually towards the lagoon. In the background was a wall of rock, about forty feet in height, forming the limit of the next terrace, while on either hand the trees served as an efficient screen from all winds save those blowing from the sea.

By the aid of their axes the lads felled five young palms, and soon stripped them of their heads. Four of the trunks were then lashed in pairs, and set up with guy-ropes at a distance of about fifteen feet apart, and one end of the

fifth pole was placed over the crutch formed by one of the pairs.

This done, Ellerton swarmed up the other pair of poles and fastened a small pulley to the extremity of one of them. A rope was passed through the block, one end being lashed to the lower part of the fifth pole that rested on the ground.

"Haul away, lads!" he shouted.

And the pole, lifted into a horizontal position, was quickly placed between, thus forming the ridge of the tent.

One of the fore and aft sails was then thrown over the ridge pole and its end pegged down; while to make doubly sure, the lads piled stones and sand upon the ends of the canvas. Filling in the back and front of the tent with portions of another sail took an hour's steady work, and the dwelling was then pronounced ready for occupation.

The box of ammunition, the rifles, bread cask, and water-beakers were neatly stowed against the afterpart of their dwelling, till, on Mr. McKay's suggestion, a low barricade was erected close to the flap of the tent. Then pieces of canvas were cut and laid down to serve as beds, the cripple having the use of the cushions that had been brought ashore.

"I don't see why we should sleep on the hard ground," remarked Terence. "Of course, we have been used to it, but, after sleeping in a comfortable bunk, we are bound to feel the difference. So let us cut a number of small trees and fasten the strips of canvas to them like a stretcher."

This was accordingly done, the beds being raised from the ground by means of two stout planks lashed to short uprights driven firmly into the earth.

"There we are, all in a row," exclaimed Terence, as

they surveyed the result of their labour with evident satisfaction.

"Now, Quexo," said Andy, "go down to the beach and gather as much driftwood as you can carry. And, Hoppy, you start opening that tin of beef there, and I'll slice up the bread. But——"

"What?" exclaimed Terence and Ellerton.

"We are a set of donkeys! We haven't brought a pot or a kettle ashore with us."

"Boil the water in the beef-tin," said Ellerton.

"Spoil the coffee," objected Andy.

"Either that or nothing. But how about a light? Has anyone any matches?"

More disappointment. Terence suggested using the object glass of the telescope as a burning glass, but the sun was low in the heavens; Andy was for sprinkling some powder on a heap of dry leaves and firing it by means of a blank cartridge; while Ellerton vaguely remembered that fire might be obtained by rubbing two pieces of dry wood together.

"Have you ever tried to make a blaze that way?" asked Mr. McKay. "I don't think you would succeed. Savages can do the trick, I know, but I've never seen a white man obtain fire by that means. I would have suggested flint and steel. We have plenty of steel, only, unfortunately, flints are as scarce as diamonds on this island, I fancy. However, now you have exhausted your brains over the problem, allow me to assist you. Andy, put your hand in the inside pocket of my coat and you'll find my metal match-box.

"Now you are satisfied," he continued, as his son produced the required article. "The fact of the matter is, you were all in such a hurry to get ashore that you never gave a thought to the things most urgently required. Lucky for you, my lad, you've a father to think

for you. Now will you please empty that case of biscuits? I am afraid some spray splashed over it, and in time the salt will make the biscuits soft."

Andy did as he was requested, but a moment later he uttered an exclamation of surprise, for on opening the lid he discovered a kettle, saucepan, and coffee-pot, knives, forks, and spoons, while wedged in between the metal articles were bottles containing salt, pepper, vinegar, and several useful drugs in tabloid form.

"I say, pater, you are——"

"Merely one who has learnt by experience the value of forethought. While you were busy on deck I sent Quexo to gather these things and stow them in a box."

Suddenly the conversation was interrupted by a series of shrieks. The lads seized their rifles and rushed to meet the mulatto, whose face was livid with fear.

"A *caïman* is after me, señor," he shouted in his native tongue.

"Nonsense," replied Andy; then turning to his companions he explained that the mulatto had declared that an alligator had run after him.

"It's impossible," he added. "However, we'll see what's frightened him."

On emerging from the edge of the wood that had obstructed their view of that part of the bay where Quexo had been to gather dry sticks, the lads burst into a roar of laughter. Sedately waddling over the sand was a huge turtle.

"Follow me, Hoppy," exclaimed Andy. "Get between him and the sea; we can't afford to lose this chance."

Finding its retreat cut off, the turtle began to throw up showers of sand with its flippers, but Andy rushed it, and, seizing one of the creature's horny limbs, strove to capsize the reptile.

The task was beyond him; even with the aid of his

two chums he could not raise the shell-clad creature from the sand.

"Get hold of an oar and one of the empty tubs," he exclaimed breathlessly. "You go, Terence. Hoppy and I will prevent the turtle getting away."

Presently Terence returned with the desired article, and using the oar as a lever the three lads succeeded in turning the turtle on its back, when Andy, with a dexterous sweep of his knife, cut the animal's throat.

"Hurrah! Turtle steak to-morrow, pater!" he shouted on their return to the camp.

Quexo gathered up the firewood that he had droppcd in his flight, and as darkness set in, a roaring fire was kindled, and a gorgeous supper eaten.

Then, ere the last dying embers had ceased to glow, Terence, who had volunteered to keep the first two hours' watch, shouldered his rifle and took up his position in the shelter of the neighbouring palm-trees.

CHAPTER VI

THE ANIMAL THAT WOULDN'T BE RESCUED

No unusual incident marked the castaways' first night on the island. Guard was relieved with the utmost regularity, while the weary watches were spent in gazing at the exterior of the tent and listening to the regular breathing of its four inmates.

At length the day broke, and the camp became the scene of activity.

Breakfast over, there was a rush to the boat; Quexo, however, remaining with the injured Mr. McKay.

The weather showed every indication of remaining fine, a light south-easterly breeze—a part of the regular trade-wind—blowing off shore, while not a cloud was visible in the dark blue sky.

"We must make two trips to-day," observed Andy, as they pushed off from the little natural dock. "Yesterday the clouds kept the sun's rays from us, but to-day we will not be able to work during midday."

"Honestly, I don't feel like work," remarked Terence, stifling a yawn.

"I suppose there is some excuse for you, seeing you did two turns of sentry-go last night," replied his friend. "Still, this is an exceptional time, and we must set to work with a will. Can we get over the reef, do you think, Hoppy?"

"We had better stick to the channel," replied Ellerton.

"You see, we don't know the actual depth, and there is a slight swell on. We'll board on the port quarter, so as to get between the ship and the reef."

The lads plied their oars steadily yet without undue exertion, and in less than half an hour from the time of leaving the shore they ran alongside the stranded *San Martin*.

Ellerton's first care on boarding the wreck was to supply fresh water and food to the animals. To get them safely ashore was a difficult problem, for the ox was an unwieldy brute to ship aboard the cutter, while it was equally risky to let it swim ashore on account of the presence of numerous sharks. The sheep could be trussed up and laid upon the bottom boards.

Andy and Terence at once made for the provision-room, and returned laden with flour, salt beef, tinned goods, and some small chests of pressed tea. These articles they placed on deck close to the entry port and proceeded to procure more.

Ellerton, having attended to the live stock, made a thorough exploration of the after cabins and staggered on deck looking like a second-hand wardrobe dealer, for he realised the necessity of having a good supply of clothing. Then a huge pile of bedding, including waterproof sheets, blankets, and pillows, was added to the already large collection of plunder.

"I think this lot will be sufficient for one trip," remarked Andy.

"We may as well take the rest of the navigating instruments," replied Ellerton, "and, what is also necessary, the carpenter's chest."

"Capital," replied his chum. "That will, of course, come in handy; but won't we require it on board?"

"There are enough tools for work both ashore and on board," said Ellerton. "I've seen to that. But I should like to get the animals off."

"The ox ?"

"If possible. Otherwise we must kill it and bring the carcase ashore piecemeal."

Andy thought for some moments. He, too, realised the danger of the animal being devoured by sharks. Dead or alive, the ox would be far more useful to the castaways.

"How are we going to get the brute on deck ?" asked Terence.

This was a poser, for with the fall of the foremast the derricks for working the fore-hold had also been carried away.

"We must rig up a pair of sheer-legs," observed Ellerton.

"Well ? How are we to pass a sling round the brute's body ?"

"That's as easy as pie ; the beast is quiet enough."

"Then you take the job on, Hoppy ; I'd rather not. So let's look sharp with the sheer-legs ; there's plenty of tackle to hoist the creature with."

The work of making the early preparations proceeded without a hitch, then Ellerton commenced his particular part of the operations.

By the aid of a lantern which he hung from the deck-beams, the apprentice descended once more to the partially submerged hold. Holding a stout canvas sling, with a rope ready to haul tight the moment the lifting gear was in position, Ellerton climbed over the partition of the stall.

The animal, now refreshed by its food and drink, had lost its docile manner, and eyed the intruder with no friendly spirit. Possibly it thought the youth was one of the brutal Peruvian cattle-drivers. If so, there was some excuse for its action, for lowering its head the brute tossed the apprentice right over the wooden partition,

landing him squarely in the midst of the startled sheep in the adjacent pen.

"Aren't you nearly ready?" asked a voice from above.

Ellerton sat up. He was beginning to feel pain in more than one part of his anatomy. The task of tackling an apparently inoffensive ox was not going to be quite so easy as he imagined.

"Come and bear a hand," he replied. "The brute is getting vicious."

Andy thereupon descended into the semi-gloom of the hold.

"Be careful," continued the apprentice. "He nearly bumped my head against the deck-beams; as it was, I had a flight through space."

"Then I'm not going to pass a sling round him," said Andy. "We'll lasso him just behind the horns."

This was done, but then came the difficulty: how were they to release the animal from the stall and drag it to the hatchway?

"Look here," explained Andy, "I'll take this end of the line on deck, wind it on to the tackle, and heave taut. Then we'll unship this ladder and you can unfasten the front of the stall."

"Then what happens to me?" objected Ellerton.

"Oh, you can make a bolt to the fore end of the hold and stay there till Terence and I haul the brute on deck. Then we'll re-ship the ladder and you can get out."

Ellerton had his doubts, but he followed his companion's counsel. Directly there was a strain on the lasso, he threw open the door of the stall and rushed for the shelter of the sheep-pen.

Bellowing lustily, and contesting every inch of the way, the animal was slowly dragged towards the hatch, to the accompaniment of a lusty "Heave-ho!" from the two youths on deck.

ANDY, FINDING THE BULL CLOSE TO HIS HEELS, GRIPPED A ROPE AND SWUNG HIMSELF INTO A POSITION OF COMPARATIVE SAFETY

To face page 55.

Terence watched the operation with considerable misgiving, expecting every moment to see the rope part and to find himself confronted by the infuriated brute.

Slowly the animal was forced across the floor of the hold, then its ponderous carcase rose, kicking and plunging, in the air.

As the animal appeared above the coaming, the light of day revealed—not a mild ox, but an unusually sturdy specimen of an Andalusian bull!

"Belay there, and lower away the after guy!" shouted Andy, "or he'll drop down the hatch again when we let go."

Terence hastened to obey; but, allowing the sheers to incline too far forward, the infuriated animal's legs touched the deck.

Instantly the brute made a wild rush, the lassoo parted like pack thread, and the next moment Terence and Andy were flying for their lives, while Ellerton, a prisoner in the hold, heard the thunder of the animal's hoofs and its triumphant bellowing as it revelled in its new-found freedom.

Andy made a desperate rush aft, but finding the bull close to his heels, gripped a rope hanging from the boat booms, and swung himself into a position of comparative safety upon one of the narrow timbers, his upward flight being assisted a little too well by the obliging animal.

Never did matador execute a more rapid leap over the barrier than did Andy on this occasion. Terence, finding that he was not pursued, took a more leisurely step, and hoisted himself into the main shrouds, where he would be quite safe from any further onslaught of the animal.

For a while the bull eyed the fugitives with undisguised disappointment, then spying the heap of bedding and clothing on the deck, it lowered its head and rushed headlong to the attack.

Both lads watched the proceedings, powerless to prevent the catastrophe, and indulging in vain regrets that their firearms were not available, as beds, blankets, and suits of useful clothing were tossed overboard.

At length a heavy blanket became impaled upon the brute's horns, the folds falling over its eyes.

In vain the bull strove to toss aside the fabric ; then, rushing along the deck, it collided with ventilators, hatchways, and other obstacles, each obstruction increasing its anger. Wheeling suddenly, the bull darted through the entry port and vanished over the ship's side.

" Oh, the boat ! The boat will be smashed to firewood," shouted Andy, sliding down from his perch.

Terence had joined him, and, heedless of Ellerton's voice shouting to be released from his prison, the two lads rushed to the side of the vessel.

The animal had fallen upon one of the thwarts of the boat, breaking it completely in half, and was lying on the bottom-boards plunging wildly. One kick in a vital place and the boat would be holed.

" There's enough damage done already," muttered Andy. " It's the only way," and running aft he returned in a moment with a loaded rifle.

" How are you going to manage it ? " asked Terence. " You'll do almost as much damage to the boat with the bullet——"

" Shut up ! " growled Andy, and, snapping the safety catch of the weapon, he swung himself without further delay into the stern sheets of the cutter.

The bull tried to rise, but in vain. Its head reared itself slightly above the gunwale ; the rifle cracked.

" There's fresh beef at least, Terence. Throw Hoppy the tail end of a rope and get him out of that hole."

Then, as Ellerton appeared, blinking in the strong sunshine, Andy continued :

"Throw those things into the boat, and look sharp. We've wasted enough time and precious cargo this morning—all for the sake of that brute."

During the time the boat was being rowed shoreward, Andy—usually so genial and even-tempered—preserved an almost sullen silence; while Ellerton, annoyed at having failed to bring the bull ashore alive, was also ill at ease. Nor did the latter guess the cause of his friend's glumness till some days later, when he observed Andy repairing a rent in one of his garments. Even a graze from an infuriated bull is likely to cause discomfort, he thought, though there is no reason why others should suffer for it.

CHAPTER VII

THE EMBLEM OF EMPIRE

"You've been a long time," remarked Mr. McKay, as the three youths made their appearance.

"Yes," admitted Terence, "I'm afraid we have; but we must blame Hoppy's bull."

"Hoppy's bull?" asked Mr. McKay.

"Yes, the ox turned out to be a bull—and a tough customer he was," replied Terence, who then proceeded to give Mr. McKay a graphic description of how they had tried to unload the bull from the wreck.

"And how do you feel to-day?" asked Ellerton.

"Considerably better," replied the injured man.

"You've been moved," declared Andy, pointing to some marks in the grass.

"I plead guilty," replied his father with a smile. "Quexo dragged my couch out in the sunshine. I wanted to take an observation at midday. Just hand me that chart. I've pricked our position. Here it is. Reduced to English degrees the latitude is 21° 4′ 15″ S. and the longitude 134° 17′ 14″ W. of Greenwich. As I suspected, we are on the fringe of the Low Archipelago, well away from the Great Circle route between Panama and New Zealand, and equally remote from the regular tracks between the Sandwich Islands and Cape Horn. That means that unless a whaler or stray trading vessel puts in here, or that we make the cutter seaworthy enough

for a thousand-mile voyage, our stay here is likely to be indefinitely prolonged."

"I'm sure I don't mind," observed Andy.

"Nor I, if only my people knew we were safe," added Terence, and Ellerton expressed himself in a similar manner.

"Isn't the heat oppressive?" said Andy. "It's like an oven here."

"Yes," assented his father. "I can see we've made a mistake in choosing this spot. It's splendidly sheltered —too much so—for what with the rocks behind us and the palm groves on either side, the air cannot circulate. We must find a more open spot on the next terrace."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't have two camps —one for stormy weather and the other for the dry season," replied Andy. "Once we've finished with the wreck we can set to and build a more substantial home. But what do you say? Hadn't we better unload the boat?"

"I'm game," replied Ellerton.

"What did you bring ashore?" asked Mr. McKay.

"Mostly provisions, bedding, and clothing, though that beastly bull tossed a lot of stuff overboard. We've also brought the rest of the navigation instruments."

"Are you making another trip to-day?"

"I hope so," replied Ellerton. "I shall not be satisfied till those poor sheep are safely ashore. By the by, Andy, you might tell Quexo to build a fence between the rock and the edge of this terrace. It won't take long, and it will inclose enough pasture land to feed the sheep for some time to come."

"I'll tell him directly we've had lunch; but come on, unloading the boat will take all our spare time before lunch, and we mustn't work too hard in this broiling sun."

By the time the cutter's cargo was brought up to the camp Quexo had prepared the meal. This over, the inhabitants of the Nameless Island indulged in a siesta till the sun was sufficiently low in the heavens to enable them to resume work.

"Don't forget to bring some lamps ashore," said Mr. McKay, as the three lads prepared to set off to the wreck. "And a bundle of signal flags, while you are about it."

This time the salvage operations were uninterrupted. The sheep, securely trussed up, were placed in the boat, while the bunting, lamps, a portable galley, and a set of blacksmith's tools, including a bellows and anvil, were also lowered into the cutter without mishap.

"Let's get the hatch off and see what is in the fore-hold," suggested Ellerton.

The hold was full of water, as the lads had expected, but a hasty examination showed that the part of the cargo nearest the opening was composed of several sheets of galvanised corrugated iron.

"This is fortunate," exclaimed Andy. "We'll be able to knock up a decent house. But what's that I can see for'ard ?"

"Looks like farming implements," suggested Terence.

"You are wrong," replied Andy. "I know; it's what the Americans term a runabout."

"A what ?" asked Ellerton.

"A runabout—otherwise a motor-car."

"Fancy a motor-car on the Nameless Island!" exclaimed Terence, and the lads burst into a fit of hearty laughter at the incongruous idea.

"We'll have it ashore in time," observed Andy. "It will come in useful."

"How ?"

"Never mind how. I have an idea, and, all being well, I'll fix it up to a good purpose."

"Suppose we try and find the bill of lading and the charter-party; they will give us some idea of the nature of the cargo."

A search revealed the required documents, but, being in Spanish, the apprentice could make no meaning to the text.

"Snakes!" ejaculated Andy. "There's enough to set us up as universal providers! Woollen and cotton goods, boots and leggings, hardware of American manufacture, nine cases of rifles—for some blooming insurgents more than likely—30,000 rounds of ammunition, and —hullo, this looks dangerous!—two tons of dynamite; building and railroad materials, agricultural implements, and one petrol-driven runabout, consigned to Monsieur Georges Lacroix, Grand Bassin, Tahiti. Well, I'm afraid Monsieur Georges Lacroix will have to wait for his motor-car!"

"By Jove, we are lucky!" ejaculated Ellerton. "That is, provided we get the stuff ashore."

"We'll do it," replied his chum resolutely. "Only give us time and good weather, and we'll leave precious little on the *San Martin*, I can assure you."

"Time to be off," exclaimed Terence. "It will be dark in an hour."

So, thrusting the documents into his belt, Andy dropped over the side, and received the rest of the articles that the lads had collected. Then, well laden, the boat returned to the shore.

"We've much to be thankful for," exclaimed Mr. McKay, after he had perused the ship's papers. "There is, I think, no need for anxiety as to our future. You brought the signal flags, I hope?"

"Yes," replied Ellerton, "and a couple of Peruvian ensigns."

"Good! I'm going to make up a Union Jack. There

are two reasons for doing so. The first is that it can be used as a means of attracting passing vessels; the second, and more important to my mind, is that it signifies that the island becomes part of the British Empire. I've been going into the question pretty deeply. You may be aware that the Low Archipelago belongs to France. These islands consists of a number of flat coral islands, hence their name. Now, as this island is lofty and of volcanic origin, I cannot see that it can be classed as belonging to the Low Archipelago, even though it is not far distant from that group. Neither does it appear to have been inhabited, so we may be pretty safe in claiming it. Terence, there's a pencil and paper close to your elbow; will you please sketch a plan of a Union Jack?"

Terence did so, but the result was not to Mr. McKay's satisfaction.

"You try, Andy."

Nor was Andy's attempt any more satisfactory, so Ellerton was put to the test.

"Shame on you, lads!" exclaimed Mr. McKay reproachfully. "Three members of the good old British Empire, and unable to draw its national ensign correctly. Here, hand me that pencil."

"Now do you see," he continued, after he had explained the various minute particulars of the flag. "There's a broad white diagonal above the two portions of St. Patrick's cross next to the pole, and a broad white diagonal below the two portions farthest from the pole. If the flag is hoisted in any manner but the correct the ensign becomes a signal of distress. Often in bygone days hostile ships have attempted to sail under British colours, and in nine cases out of ten their ignorance of its peculiarities has led to their undoing. However, we'll postpone the cutting out till the rest of the boat's cargo is brought up."

"How is Quexo getting on?" asked Ellerton.

"He's been away the whole afternoon. I guess your fence is nearly completed by now."

"Then I'll go and see how he is progressing," remarked the apprentice.

The mulatto had indeed made rapid strides, for only a few feet more remained to be done, so Ellerton returned to the boat to liberate the sheep. Ere nightfall the pen was tenanted by a score of animals, frisking with enjoyment at finding themselves once more in pasture.

That evening three large lamps contributed to the comfort of the tent. The lads, tired out with their exertions, were "taking things easy," lamenting the fact that there was no literature to beguile the time.

Mr. McKay, having been raised to a sitting position, called for the bunting. Laboriously he threaded a needle and commenced his lengthy task.

"One moment, sir," exclaimed Ellerton. "Wouldn't a sewing machine be better?"

"A what? Bless the lad! Where's a machine to be had?"

"On board, sir. I noticed a couple in the fo'c'sle. You see, a seaman has to make his own duds."

"Very well, I'll put off the job till to-morrow, if you'll remember to bring one of the things ashore."

"Any need to keep watch to-night, pater?" asked Andy.

"I think it would be advisable till we've explored the island. Not that I anticipate any interference, but forewarned is forearmed."

Mr. McKay's words proved to be correct. Nothing occurred to disturb the camp during the second night ashore.

"Do you think that Terence and you can manage by yourselves?" asked Mr. McKay during breakfast.

"I think so," replied Ellerton.

"Then Andy can take Quexo and make an exploration of the interior. I particularly want him to reach the summit of the hill, so as to find out if there are other islands in the vicinity."

"You understand, Andy?" continued his father. "Keep a sharp look-out for signs of past or present inhabitants, any animals you may come across—there may be a few pigs—and, above all, note the general extent of the island and the position of its neighbours, if visible. Don't overburden yourselves; a revolver and twenty rounds apiece, a water-bottle, and some provisions will be quite enough to carry. Rest on the summit of the hill during the heat of the day, and get back here well before sunset."

Having seen the explorers on their way, Ellerton and Donaghue pushed off the cutter and rowed to the wreck.

It was again an ideal morning, and without the faintest hitch the boat was made fast alongside the battered hull of the *San Martin*.

"I've a mind to try and patch up that gig," remarked Ellerton, gazing at the battered boat.

"Take too much time," was Terence's reply.

"No, I mean to fasten some painted canvas over the hole and nail some copper sheathing outside the canvas to protect it. It won't be a long job, so meanwhile you might clear all the light gear out of the cabins and saloon."

Two hours sufficed to effect the temporary repairs, and the gig on being launched let in very little water. Ellerton was overjoyed with his success.

"We'll take a double load ashore, Terence," he exclaimed. "We may as well make a start by clearing the for'ard hold."

So saying, Ellerton began to strip off his clothing. He was an expert swimmer and diver, and these qualifications stood him in good stead.

Taking a strong hook attached to a rope in his hand, he dived from the coaming of the hatchway. The top of the stacks of galvanised iron was but a few feet below the surface, and in a few seconds the hook was affixed to the wire rope that held the plates together.

Then, regaining the deck, the apprentice assisted his companion in hauling their booty out of the hold.

Six times the operation was repeated, till the deck resembled a "tin" city in the western plains of Arizona.

"It takes it out of you," remarked Ellerton. "I wish we could get rid of the water in the hold; though I'm afraid the vessel's too badly strained to be able to patch up her sides."

"Even then we would have a bother to get rid of the water," replied Terence. "Still, we've done very well up to now."

"There's all that railway line material underneath the iron sheeting; that will want some shifting."

"We'll do it some time, but now we'll get off home."

It seemed natural for the lads to talk of the camp as "home," for already they were becoming attached to the free, yet none the less comfortable, manner of living.

"Wait while I get the sewing machine from the fo'c'sle. But you may as well come, too, and we'll take both of them."

With this, Ellerton, accompanied by Terence, made his way for'ard. In the gloom of the stuffy fo'c'sle, the sight of which forcibly reminded him of his quarters on the *Tophet*, Ellerton found the required articles.

"Hullo, here's a 'find!'" he exclaimed, holding up a concertina.

"Sling the blessed thing overboard," replied Terence

laughing. "If you take it ashore it's bound to make trouble in the camp."

"It may come in handy."

Ellerton looked upon everything as being likely "to come in handy." He would have overstocked the island with useless things in the hope that they might be of use at some distant date. In this case, did he but know it, the concertina was fated to play a most useful part.

"All right, then," assented Terence good-humouredly. "To look at us now one would think we were going to run old women's sewing meetings and popular Saturday night concerts."

With the gig in tow, the lads returned to the shore, putting off the unloading of their boat till the evening, though they brought the sewing machines with them to the tent.

"Now I can get on," exclaimed Mr. McKay. "It's slow work lying here and unable to do a decent bit of hard work."

Lunch, followed by the customary siesta, occupied the rest of the afternoon. By the aid of a telescope Andy and Quexo had been seen on the summit of the hill, and their descent followed till an intervening spur hid them from sight. Mr. McKay calculated that they would be home within a couple of hours.

"You might cut down a suitable palm tree—one about forty feet in height—Terence," he added. "I should like to have the flag flying on their return."

The tree was easily felled, and a small block, with signal halliards rove, was fastened to its smaller end. This done, a hole was dug to receive the pole, and by the aid of a pair of guys the flagstaff was erected and set up in quite a professional style.

About five in the afternoon Andy and the mulatto returned. They reported that from the summit of the

hill the island appeared to be nearly circular, without any noticeable bays that might serve as boat harbours.

The reef extended completely around the island, approaching it closely on the southern side, while there were three well-defined entrances besides the one they already knew about.

Andy reckoned that the extreme length of the island was about seven miles, its breadth barely a mile less. There were no other islands visible, but as the sea was hazy away on the north-west it was possible that land might lie in that direction.

"Then, assuming the altitude to be one thousand feet, your horizon would be approximately forty-two miles off," remarked Mr. McKay. "Well, in that case we are not likely to be troubled by our neighbours, for the nearest island cannot be less than fifty miles away. Did you find any signs of the island having been inhabited?"

"Yes," replied Andy, "we found this," and opening a leather sling case he produced a pistol. It was a quaint specimen of a flint-lock weapon, its large-bore barrel eaten with rust and its silver-mounted walnut stock pitted and rotted by exposure.

"I don't think the gentleman who dropped this article is in a fit state to call upon us," observed Mr. McKay. "Nevertheless, it shows that we are not the first civilised people to set foot on the island. What is the interior like?"

"There are distinct signs of a volcano about. The top of the hill is most certainly an extinct volcano, while the base is honeycombed with fissures like the volcano of Monotombo. Otherwise the island is well wooded."

"You've done well," commented Mr. McKay. "Now it's nearly sunset, so there will be just time to hoist the Union Jack."

"Finished it, then, pater?"

"Rather! Now, Andy, you hoist the emblem of empire!"

Amid the cheers of the band of Britishers the ensign was broken at the masthead. For a few minutes it fluttered idly in the breeze, then, as the sun sank beneath the horizon, the Jack was slowly lowered.

They had asserted the King's authority over the island to which they had now given the name of McKay's Island.

CHAPTER VIII

"A SAIL!"

For the next five months things went smoothly at McKay's Island.

Taking every advantage of the remaining period of the dry season, the lads worked hard. Almost everything of value was removed from the wreck.

The heavy lengths of railway lines were safely transported to the shore; the motor-car, its mechanism not altogether useless, was stored under a canvas canopy on the lower terrace.

The ship's dynamos were removed, as well as the lighter portion of the main propelling machinery, while the remaining derricks, practically the whole of the wire rigging, and all the woodwork that could be taken away, had found a safe storage-place on McKay's Island.

Most of the dynamite had been cautiously conveyed ashore and placed in some of the numerous caves at a safe distance from the camp. The remainder of the explosive had been judiciously used—under Andy's direction, for his experiences at San Eugenio had not been thrown away—in demolishing those portions of the wreck that prevented easy access to the precious cargo.

Only the bare hull of the *San Martin* now remained. No doubt the first on-shore hurricane would sweep away every vestige of the ill-fated vessel, but the castaways

were satisfied with the knowledge that nothing of value remained on board.

Nor had the work ashore been delayed. Already a substantial three-roomed building of galvanised iron reared itself proudly upon the second terrace. Its furniture—the best that the state-rooms and cabins of the *San Martin* could provide—would have made many a stay-at-home Englishman green with envy.

The lads had contrived to lay a double set of rails from the shore up the steep path to the lower terrace. Then, by means of a steel hawser attached to two sets of trucks, they were able to draw the bulk of their goods to the higher level with little difficulty.

The mode of locomotion, thanks to Andy's ready skill, was comparatively simple.

At first Terence wished to utilise the motor of the "runabout"; but to this proposal Andy objected, having another purpose in view for the undelivered consignment for Monsieur Georges Lacroix.

Included in the rolling stock were several iron tip waggons, of the kind generally in use in mining districts. Two of these Andy attached to each of his "trains." Those on the upper level he filled with earth, till the weight, being greater than the other set of waggons, caused the former to descend the incline, and at the same time raise the trucks filled with cargo from the beach.

This plan acted very well, but the labour in filling the trucks with soil was tedious; so Andy conceived the brilliant idea of trapping some of the water from the little stream, and conveying it by means of a length of iron pipe supported on trestles into the empty tip waggons.

From that moment the "McKay's Island Express" was in full working order, and the task of hauling the

salved cargo up the terrace became a matter of comparative ease.

Those five months had worked wonders in Mr. McKay. Though weak on his feet, he was able to walk, and showed promise of soon throwing off all ill-effects of his double misfortune.

As a natural result of his prolonged convalescence he had grown stout. This was a source of worry to him, and he longed to be able to get about again as usual.

Amongst their many undertakings, the lads found time to make use of the remains of the disabled gig.

Realising that the work of replacing the garboards and keel would not repay the amount of labour expended on the work, they cut the boat in two, and built transoms to each of the sound ends. Thus they possessed two light craft, each about ten feet in length, and easy to haul up and down the beach.

When occasion served, they could also bolt the two transoms together, and thus form one boat, resembling the original gig with a slice of her 'midship section missing.

The craft proved of great service while the cutter was under reconstruction. This was a big task, for not only had the lads given her a fairly deep keel, to make her more seaworthy, but a cabin, water-tight well, and decked fo'c'sle were added. The rig was altered to that of a yawl, while Andy hoped at an early date to instal the motor in her.

Hitherto his difficulties lay in the fact that the motor was not water cooled, nor was it adapted to consume kerosene. They had a plentiful supply of that fuel, but of petrol they had none. Nevertheless, Andy had firm faith in his capabilities, and trusted to overcome these difficulties all right.

In this craft the hopes of the inhabitants of McKay's

Island were centred. Although happy in their little domain, for plenty of work had proved the greatest factor to their well-being, they yearned at times for the society of their fellow-men and civilisation.

Directly the rainy season was over the little party meant to try their fate upon the broad Pacific. It was to be a risky voyage, but others had done similar passages under worse conditions. Blythe, of H.M.S. *Bounty*, for instance, did he not successfully accomplish a voyage of 4000 miles in an open boat in forty-one days ?

The advent of the rainy season was heralded by a hurricane of terrific force.

Giving but little warning, the storm swept over the island, uprooting trees and turning the tiny rivulets into foaming torrents. The usually placid surface of the lagoon became a seething cauldron, huge breakers sweeping completely over the reef and lashing themselves upon the rock-strewn beach.

Well it was that the lads had hauled their craft above the reach of those breakers, for on the morning following the commencement of the storm not a vestige of the hull of the *San Martin* was to be seen.

Fortunately the house was solidly constructed. The hail pelted on the iron roof, the windows rattled and the doors shook to such an extent that it became necessary to barricade them, while almost incessantly the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled in deafening peals.

While the rains lasted there was very little outside work done. Welcome as were the showers at first, they soon became monotonous. It was too hot to wear oil-skins, the ground was too soft to walk on without sinking ankle deep in mire, so that the castaways were thrown upon their own resources to pass the time as well as they were able within doors.

Lack of books had been their greatest discomfort,

even the study of the Spanish charts and treatises on navigation became a pleasure; paper and writing materials they possessed, and Mr. McKay systematically wrote up his diary.

But the task that gave the lads the greatest pleasure and amusement was their efforts to teach Quexo English.

The mulatto was a willing though difficult pupil, and was doubly handicapped by being unable to write even his own language. Nevertheless, before the rainy season was over, Quexo could understand most of what was said to him, and was able to reply in weird sentences and phrases that often set the lads laughing.

At length the "off season"—as Terence termed it—passed, its departure being marked by almost as severe a hurricane as the one that preceded it.

Then for three days and nights a thick mist overspread the island. The air resembled that of a hothouse, without the least suspicion of a breeze.

On the morning of the fourth day the sun shone in an unclouded sky, the mud disappeared as if by the touch of a magic wand, and the inhabitants of McKay's Island awoke to their life of outdoor activity.

"I think we will do well to postpone the time of our departure for another month," remarked Mr. McKay. "We shall then have more chance of a wind, and the zone of the Trades will extend farther north by then. We shall have plenty to see, too, in a month."

"I want to get the motor fixed up," observed Andy. "I think my plan for making a water-jacket will succeed, and installing the engine and tuning it up will take quite a week."

"If you succeed the motor will prove invaluable, especially if we lose the benefit of the Trades," replied his father.

Andy was hard at work making a propeller. This he

did by means of two sheets of steel plating riveted to an iron boss ; for, in order to prevent the boat from being unduly kept back while under sail alone, he had decided to have but two blades, which when at rest were up and down, in line with the boat's stern-post.

Terence, who was also of an engineering turn of mind, had embarked upon a somewhat ambitious programme. He meant to use the dynamo for lighting purposes.

" But," objected Ellerton, " what's the use ? We are leaving the island shortly."

" Possibly ; but I am looking beyond then, Hoppy. Provided I could be sure of a passage to 'Frisco occasionally I would not mind settling down here. No doubt I am indulging in wild day-dreams, but still, my plans may mature, and there's a living to be made out of the island. But to deal with present events ; the dynamo will be of great service to us, as we can recharge those accumulators we brought ashore. Then Andy will be able to use electrical ignition for his motor instead of the slower and more uncertain lamp ignition."

" Quite so, Terence," assented Andy. " So carry on, my boy."

Thus encouraged, Terence, assisted by Ellerton and Quexo, dug a deep trench close to the brink of the lower terrace, the side of which he lined with thick planks from the wreck.

Next a water-wheel, twelve feet in diameter, was constructed, the paddle floats being cut from the iron plates obtained from the same source. A portion of the ship's piston rods formed the axle of the wheel, a grooved drum being attached to take the driving belt of the dynamo.

At length came the critical test of Terence's work. The stream, once more diverted, was conducted into the trench, and as the last barrier to its progress was removed the water rushed through its new channel. Then, with a

cascade of silver splashing from its floats, the wheel began to gather way, and was soon spinning merrily.

"That's all very fine," exclaimed Andy, who had left his work to view the opening ceremony of the McKay Island Power Company. "But how are you going to stop the wheel? It will soon wear its axle out at that rate; and, besides, we can't have that noise day and night."

"Never thought of that!" replied Terence. "We must make a hatch to trap the water when we don't require the power."

Two days later the dynamo was in full working order. The lads were highly delighted, and suggested several schemes for making use of the electric current.

Then came Andy's triumph. After many difficulties and failures he succeeded in duly installing the motor in the yawl, and on a trial trip inside the lagoon the boat behaved magnificently under power.

"We'll have a trip round the island to-morrow," he exclaimed, as the craft was moored for the night. "Let's turn in early so as to make a start immediately after sunrise."

The morning dawned bright and calm, with no wind.

"It will mean running under power," observed Andy, as the lads, laden with provisions and tins of kerosene, wended their way to the shore. "I mean to——"

He stopped, his eyes fixed seaward.

His companions followed his gaze, and simultaneously there was a shout of:

"A sail!"

CHAPTER IX

UNWELCOME VISITORS

"GREAT Scott! It's a native canoe," declared Mr. McKay. "And she's heading straight for the island!"

The craft was some little distance from the entrance to the reef, her huge brown sail hanging idly from its yard, while the crew vigorously plied their paddles as they made the water fly from her sharp prow.

"Trouble in store?" queried Andy.

"It's well to be prepared," replied his father. "I know these natives of old. Sometimes they are quiet and inoffensive, at another time they are bold and warlike, or, what is worse, extremely treacherous."

"Then we must arm ourselves?"

"Assuredly. Quexo, bring my glass."

The mulatto darted off, and presently reappeared, bringing a glass of lime-juice.

"Not that, you ass!" exclaimed Mr. McKay, laughing. "Glass—telescope—see?" and he raised his hands to imitate the operation of using a telescope. "I'll have the drink, anyhow."

Once more Quexo ran to the house, this time bringing back the required instrument.

"There are at least forty natives," said Mr. McKay, after a lengthy examination of the oncoming craft. "They may be armed. If so, their weapons are lying on

the bottom of the canoe. But unless I am very much mistaken, there's a white man aboard."

"A prisoner? Let me have a look, pater!"

In his eagerness Andy almost snatched the telescope from his parent's hand.

"A queer set of customers," he exclaimed; "but I don't think the white man is a captive, for he's talking to a fellow with his hair frizzed up a foot above his head."

"We've seen enough for the time being," rejoined Mr. McKay quietly, "so we'll return to the house and serve out the arms. At the rate they are travelling, the canoe will be here in ten minutes."

"They won't injure the boat?" asked Andy anxiously, for the yawl was almost like a child to him.

"Not when they see us with rifles in our hands. Whatever you do, don't let them have reason to think we want to fight, and, above all, don't show any signs of fear."

The party quickly strapped on their ammunition belts and revolver holsters, then, grasping their rifles, they hastened down to the beach.

The canoe had by this time entered the lagoon, and its occupants had perceived the house and the other buildings, for they had ceased paddling, and were gazing in wonder towards the shore. Nor did the appearance of five armed men serve to set their minds at rest.

"Hullo, there!" shouted Mr. McKay.

"Hullo, there!" was the reply. "What's your game?"

"What's yours?" replied Mr. McKay.

"All square, governor. Can we land?"

"Provided you keep your people in order," replied Mr. McKay, then turning to his companions he exclaimed: "By Jove! I know that fellow; he's no good, I'm afraid."

"You know him?"

"Yes, I met him on a pearl-fisher in Torres Strait

twenty odd years ago. He hasn't changed much in appearance, and I'm afraid his manners haven't. Still, I'll not claim acquaintanceship with him at present."

The paddles were resumed, and the canoe glided quietly to the shore. The natives, for the most part stark naked, began to tumble over the side, some grasping enormous clubs studded with sharks' teeth, and others long triple-barbed spears.

"Tell those fellows to throw those weapons back into the canoe," shouted Mr. McKay sternly. "Otherwise we'll not permit them to land."

The white man spoke a few words to the turban-haired native, who in turn uttered an order to his men. Instantly the weapons were thrown into the canoe with a loud clatter, and the natives, wading ashore, secured their boat and proceeded to squat in a semicircle.

"My name's Blight—Jimmy Blight," exclaimed the stranger.

Mr. McKay merely nodded his head in reply. He could not bring himself to say the words "Pleased to see you," for the simple reason that he was not.

Jimmy Blight had had a chequered career. He was a man of about fifty years of age, some five feet eight inches in height, and of medium build. Years of exposure to a tropical sun had not left any trace upon his face, for his complexion was a chalky white. He had a bristling, dark moustache; cut high over the lips, a scanty crop of dark hair, a thin, straight nose, rather deep-set eyes that were continually shifting in expression, while his hands, the broad nails of which were bitten to the quick, showed little trace of hard work.

When Mr. McKay first met him he was mate of a pearling vessel, and already he bore a bad reputation as a hard drinker and a card-sharper, while it was well known that his tyranny had more than once caused bloodshed amongst

the Kanaka crew of the vessel. By his white associates he was commonly known as "Chinese Pork"—in other words, something very unpleasant.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked Mr. McKay bluntly.

"The island's free, I guess?" replied Blight, with a leer that ill-concealed his natural aggressiveness.

"So long as you behave yourself; but should one of those men touch so much as a copper nail, we'll send you to the right about in double quick time. Understand?"

"Yes, boss. But how about a drink? You seem fixed up pretty comfortable here."

"You can have as much water as you want at the stream. Beyond that, I'm afraid we cannot provide you."

"Humph! Must take pot-luck, I suppose. Say, are you traders?"

Mr. McKay did not think it advisable to answer.

"What's your business, might I ask?" he inquired.

"It's a long story, boss. You see my mates here"—indicating the group of squatting natives—"belong to the island of Ahii, which lies seventy miles nor'west of here. In fact, I was very comfortable along of 'em, but might is right in these parts, I'll allow."

"Chinese Pork" paused to allow the weight of this sentence to take effect, but Mr. McKay betrayed no sign.

"So a few days ago a tribe of natives from Teku came and drove us out. There was a fight, you bet, but our fellows got the worst of it. So we hooked it, and took canoe to Ni Atong, which is less than twenty miles S.E. of Ahii. Ni Atong's all very well, only it ain't big enough, so we're trying to find a larger island to settle upon. There's close on a couple of hundred natives, and ten large canoes at Ni Atong. Strikes me this place 'ud suit, 'specially with white gents like yourselves for company like."

"I'm afraid you must give up all idea of bringing your friends here, Mr. Blight, or yourself either."

"Say, why?"

"Because we cannot permit it."

"Look here, boss," replied Blight with an impudent swagger. "How do you think you'll stop two hundred natives if they set their minds on landing here? Even I couldn't stop 'em."

"Let them try," replied Mr. McKay. "Now, Mr. Blight, I cannot refuse you hospitality. Food will be sent down to you; then, when your men have rested sufficiently, I must ask you to leave this island."

And turning on his heel, Mr. McKay began to make his way back to the house, the lads following him closely.

Before he had taken a dozen steps the ex-pearler ran after him.

"See here, boss; I don't mean to give offence—no offence meant—but you'll allow it's hard on a chap to be done out of his own crib by a pack o' niggers. And then you can't deny you've treated me off-handish, specially as you're the first white man I've seen these two years. So let's come to terms. I see you're well armed. Why not come back to Ahii with us, and make those chaps from Teku clear off back to their own island? Then the Ahii people won't want to trouble you. See?"

"I'll consider the matter," replied Mr. McKay. "By the by, do you ever go to Tahiti?"

"Not often, boss. I was there two years ago. When I've got a cargo of copra ready I send it by a native boat. Why do you ask?"

"I merely wanted to know, Mr. Blight. But now I must be off. I'll send the provisions along shortly, and will give you a definite reply to your proposal in a few hours. It seems to me that the easiest way out of the

mess is to accept the fellow's advice," remarked Mr. McKay as they entered their house. "We certainly don't want to try conclusions with a horde of savages on this island. No doubt we could beat them off, but in any case there is a considerable amount of risk. If I can get Blight to give me a guarantee—though I don't place much reliance on his word—backed by the chief's assurance that his men will not trespass upon the island, I think we can very well help them."

"Do you think there will be much of a struggle?" asked Ellerton.

"Between whom?"

"The natives of Ahii and the natives who took possession of their island."

"No; our presence will soon turn the scale, though we may not even have to use our firearms. You can rely upon it that I'll do my best to prevent bloodshed. Are you willing to go, lads? If you have objections don't hesitate to say so."

"I haven't," said Ellerton.

"Nor I," added the others.

"Very well, then. Quexo, take this keg of flour down to the beach, and tell that white man that his people can gather as much taro and cocoanuts as they want, so long as they don't cross to this side of the stream. You understand? Do you think we might spare Blight a lamb, Andy?"

"I think so, pater. We've twenty at least."

"Then tell Quexo to take one down when he comes back. Now, boys, if we are going on this trip, we had better make preparations. We ought to start by sunrise at least, if we want to reach Ahii before dark."

"But are we going straight to Ahii?"

"No, by Jove! I forgot that for the moment. Of course, it will be much better to spend the night off

Ni Atong—I suppose there's a lagoon—and proceed to Ahii on the following morning."

"Well, Quexo," said Andy, on the mulatto's return, "what did the white man say?"

"He say: 'Come here you number one size blackamoor. What your massa name is?' An' I say: 'I no number one size blackamoor; I no niggah, sah; an' my massa name me no give, massa he tell you his name if you ask.'"

"That's a smart reply, Quexo," replied Mr. McKay, laughing. "There's nothing like keeping your master's counsel and your own. Now take that carcase down to the beach. Ellerton, you might take a stroll along the edge of the cliff and, without attracting undue attention, keep an eye on the rascals. I don't want them straggling across the stream."

Thus bidden, Ellerton walked cautiously to the edge of the first terrace, then laying his rifle on the ground, stretched himself into a comfortable position so that he could see without being seen, and hear without being heard.

Most of the natives had dispersed, and were busily engaged in seeking taro and cocoanuts, although they kept strictly within the bounds laid down by Mr. McKay.

Blight, the chief, and a couple of natives had killed the lamb and were roasting it by the aboriginal method of caking it with clay and placing it in the red-hot embers of a fire. Although the white man cast several curious glances at the cliff, above which the roof of the house was just visible, he refrained from setting foot upon the path that led to Mr. McKay's settlement.

Late in the afternoon Mr. McKay went down to the beach and informed Blight that he had decided to lend his aid, at the same time stipulating that the natives must promise not to molest the inhabitants of McKay's Island.

The remainder of the yawl's stores were then carried aboard, Andy and Ellerton volunteering to keep watch on the boat while Mr. McKay, Terence, and Quexo took turns in patrolling the edge of the terrace.

A tent, some blankets, and a few luxuries in the way of provisions were then sent down to the ex-pearler, while the natives prepared to sleep under the shelter of the palm trees and bushes.

"If you see or hear anything of a suspicious nature, Andy," cautioned Mr. McKay, "here is a signal rocket. Don't use it except in circumstances that warrant our interference. You have plenty of ammunition?"

"Seventy rounds of rifle ammunition and fifty revolver cartridges each. You'll see that another box of ammunition comes off in the morning."

"Aye, aye," replied his father. "Now I think everything is ready to make an early start, so you had better be off."

Then, having bade the rest of the party good night, Andy and his trusty companion descended to the beach, passed between knots of curious natives, and embarked in the yawl's tender.

Five minutes later they were on board, and the ammunition stowed away within easy reach.

The lads had made an excellent job in converting the ship's cutter. From the awning-covered well a short ladder led to the cabin. Here four roomy folding bunks, a swing table, plenty of lockers and racks had been fitted, while the linoleum-covered floor, the red baize curtains, and the polished brass lamp imparted an air of comfort. Overhead a skylight served to admit both fresh air and light.

In the fo'c'sle, to which access could be obtained either by sliding doors between it and the cabin, or through a hatch on deck, were the sails, spare ropes, anchor cable,

and a small stove constructed from one of the galleys of the *San Martin*.

The motor had been installed under the floor of the well, while on the afterside of the cabin bulkhead was fixed a boat's compass, illuminated by means of the cabin lamp, so that the steersman could keep a course with comfort, whether by day or night.

"Now, Hoppy, I'll take the first watch," remarked Andy, as the sun sank beneath the lofty peak of McKay's Island. "I'll turn you out at two in the morning, and then you can carry on till daybreak, if that will suit you."

"Righto!" replied Ellerton.

And turning in upon his bunk he was soon fast asleep, lulled by the slight motion of the little craft as she rose and fell to the gentle heave of the lagoon.

CHAPTER X

STRANGE ALLIES

"TURN out, Hoppy!"

Ellerton was awake in an instant, but forgetting that the cabin of a small craft does not possess unlimited head-room, he sat up and brought his head violently in contact with the deck beams.

"What's up?" he exclaimed, grasping his revolver. "Anything wrong?"

"No," replied Andy. "Only it's two o'clock, and your watch."

"Goodness! I feel as if I've only been asleep five minutes."

"Sorry for you, then, old chap, for you've got to keep awake five hours."

So saying, Andy slid into his bunk, and within a minute his regular breathing showed that he was asleep.

Ellerton took up his position under the shelter of the dew-sodden awning. Everything was quiet, save for the occasional splash of a fish as it played upon the surface of the placid water, and the ever-present rumble of the breakers upon the distant reef.

Shorewards the outline of the island was dimly visible against the loom of the starlit sky, while a light from the seaward window of the house and the dull red gleam of the dying embers of the fire the natives had kindled were the only sign of human occupation.

Yet, Ellerton reflected, the bush might be alive with savages, awaiting the opportunity to fall upon the settlement, murder his friends, and possess themselves of the valuable stores.

Perhaps the story of the seizure of Ahii and the flight of the inhabitants to Ni Atong was a myth, invented by that rogue Blight for the purpose of luring the castaways into a false position.

There could be no doubt about it, Ellerton's nerves were "jumpy." Perhaps it was that the suddenness of coming into contact with human beings other than his comrades had acted upon his nerves.

Ellerton realised that he was entering into a new phase of his existence. He regretted it, for, beyond his natural anxiety concerning his parents, he had grown to love the isolated life on McKay's Island.

Then, should Blight's story prove to be correct, Ellerton felt sure that Mr. McKay's action was the only course permissible. The little colony was to fight for its existence, and the more remote the scene of hostilities the better chance they had of securing the sole proprietorship of the island.

Hist! A succession of faint sounds like those of a man stealthily swimming caused Ellerton to sit bolt upright, grasp his rifle, and peer intently through the darkness.

There was no mistake about it. It was some object heading directly for the yawl, its track being marked by a faint blur of phosphorescence.

Visions of bloodthirsty savages, swimming, knife in mouth, to surprise the crew of the little craft, filled Ellerton with alarm. He raised his rifle, released the safety catch, and took aim at the mysterious intruder.

"Andy," he whispered, but his friend was too deep in slumber to be awakened by a whisper.

"I'll wait till he's close alongside," muttered Ellerton, fingering the trigger.

At that moment there was a perceptible jar alongside the boat, followed by a prolonged grating sound, as if a piece of sandpaper were slowly drawn over a rough surface. Then, with a swirl and a succession of phosphorescent splashes, the object vanished.

The sound had roused Andy.

"What's up?" he exclaimed, springing into the cockpit.

Both lads looked over the side. Deep beneath the surface they saw a huge luminous shape slowly gliding away.

"My word!" whispered Andy. "Can't you see what it is? It's a shark."

"I thought it was some natives swimming off to us."

"Never fear. They'll never attempt such a thing with a sentry like that brute," replied Andy as he re-entered the cabin.

Slowly the weary hours passed, till the sun rose in a sky of misty grey, and the inhabitants of McKay's Island, both black and white, bestirred themselves into activity.

"Not much wind, boss," was Chinese Pork's salutation as Mr. McKay and his companions arrived at the beach, whither Andy had rowed in the tender.

"There'll be some before long," replied Mr. McKay. "It usually springs up about an hour after sunrise."

"It'll mean a long pull if it doesn't," rejoined Blight. "Shall I lend you four or five hands to work the sweeps?"

"I'll not trouble you, thanks. It's your men who will find it hard work, I fancy."

"Say, why? You just see them use those paddles. They'll keep it up for hours at a stretch. Your craft'll be the tail end of this 'ere procession, I guess."

"We shall see," replied Mr. McKay quietly, for he had

no desire to enlighten the ex-pearler upon the subject of the motor.

"Say, boss ? "

"Well ? "

"That's a rum packet," said Blight, indicating with a jerk of his thumb the boat the lads had made from the wreck of the gig. "I bet you never bought her at Hilo ? "

Mr. McKay did not reply. He quite realised that the ex-pearler was trying to pump him, while, on the other hand, he was equally determined to conceal the fact that he and his companions were on the island through shipwreck.

Although Mr. McKay hated deception, he wished to convey the impression that they settled here by choice, yet Blight's question showed that he kept his eyes open.

"Are you ready to start ? " demanded Mr. McKay. "There's a wind springing up from the south-east'ard."

"As soon as you like. But can you lend me a revolver, cap'n ? I've got a bloomin' Martini, but I've run out o' cartridges months and months ago."

"Here you are, and here are fifty cartridges. I'll make you a present of the pistol," replied Mr. McKay, though he realised that he was playing into the man's hands.

Then, without waiting to receive the ex-pearler's thanks, he stepped into the boat and was rowed off to the yawl.

"Good morning, Ellerton," he exclaimed. "All quiet, I suppose ? Well, let's get the canvas on her."

Already the natives were hauling their canoe down the beach, and by the time the yawl had set her sails the splash of a score of paddles showed that they had lost no time in embarking.

"Up with your helm, Andy ; check the jib sheets."

Then, as the little craft drew clear of the land, the

freshening breeze caused her to heel and glide through the ruffled water of the lagoon.

By the time they had gained the passage through the reef the yawl was ahead of the canoe.

"Glorious!" ejaculated Andy. "See, they're setting their sail. It will be a good race, after all."

Half a dozen bronzed natives were setting the raking mast and bending the yard with its enormous sail of cocoa fibre. Then, as the sail rose swiftly in the air, the breeze filled the mat-like canvas. The crew took in their paddles and watched the yawl with curious eyes.

"We are gaining on her, I think," remarked Andy.

"Yes; we must shorten sail," replied Mr. McKay. "But I want particularly to note the respective speeds of the two craft. I should think that, under sail and aided by her paddles, that canoe could overhaul us under sail alone. Yes," he continued, after a few moments' careful observation. "I think I've seen enough in case of future developments, so we'll strike the topsail."

Under reduced canvas the yawl kept the canoe at a regular distance from her, neither gaining nor allowing the latter to overhaul her. Quexo, fearing an attack of sea-sickness, had retired to the seclusion of a berth in the fo'c'sle, while Ellerton and Terence, who had kept the last portion of the previous night's watch, followed his example, though from other motives.

Andy was steering. His father, who had given him the course, was below preparing a meal.

The wind held steadily all the forenoon, and by eleven o'clock the summit of McKay's Island had dipped beneath the horizon. It was not without feelings of regret that Andy saw it disappear. He, too, realised that they were embarked upon a hazardous mission, and that possibly great sacrifice would have to be made ere they returned to their island home.

At midday the wind died away to a flat calm, the yawl rolling sluggishly in the oily swell, with her boom swaying violently from side to side, and threatening dire disaster to the heads of any of the crew that incautiously came within its reach.

The canoe, similarly situated, did not hesitate to lower the sail, and paddle close alongside.

"This is a bit rotten, cap'n," shouted Blight. "Shall I give you a tow?"

"No thanks, don't trouble about us," replied Mr. McKay. "You can paddle on ahead, and we'll follow when the breeze springs up. If we can't fetch Ni Atong before dark you might get those fellows to light a fire on the beach, so that we can come up to the anchorage."

"Righto, boss! Ta-ta!"

There was a peculiar glint in the man's eye. He fancied that the superior speed of the canoe under paddles was an asset in his favour for the events he had already planned.

The chief gave the word, the blades dipped, and, gathering way, the canoe soon gained a rapid pace. The long-drawn song of the paddlers gradually died away as the distance increased, and an hour later the canoe was lost to sight.

"Now, Andy, we'll start the motor, and creep up within a couple of miles of Ni Atong. They will think we have picked up a breeze."

"Why don't you want to let that chap Blight know we've a motor?"

"Frankly, Andy, I don't trust him. If he plays a straight game, well and good; but, should he act treacherously—and I have every reason to believe he will, judging by his past career—we must keep a trump card up our sleeves. That's why I wanted to make sure of the respective speeds of the two craft, for you may be certain that,

since the chief is in her, yonder canoe is the largest and swiftest they possess. Under power we can easily outstrip her, I have no doubt."

No sooner had the motor started than Terence and Ellerton appeared.

"Hullo! Where's the wind?" asked the latter.

"And where's the canoe? added Donaghue.

"Hull down," replied Andy. "They've gone on ahead to give us a house-warming. Now, you fellows, get yourselves something to eat, and then give us a spell. I'll let you have the course. Keep your weather eye lifting, and look out for a breeze. It may come down suddenly."

"You bet I will," assented Ellerton. "How far are we from Ni Atong?"

"About twenty miles. Directly the island hoves in sight call us."

At about four in the afternoon Terence, who had climbed the main-mast and had taken up a perch upon the diminutive cross-trees, reported land ahead.

Mr. McKay and Andy were instantly warned, and, a breeze springing up, the motor was shut off.

Half an hour later the heads of a patch of palm trees were visible from the deck.

"That's Ni Atong, right enough," commented Mr. McKay, as bit by bit the land appeared to rise above the horizon. "Blight told me that the entrance to the lagoon is easily picked out."

Ni Atong resolved itself into a low, regularly outlined island barely two miles in length. Its surface was covered with dense scrub and a few cocoanut palms, the soil being apparently loose and sandy. So far as could be seen, a coral reef extended round the island at a distance of half a mile from the shore, the rocks in places protruding above water to a height of nearly three feet.

"There's another island showing up on our port bow, sir," announced Ellerton.

"Then that's Ahii. It's a lofty island something like ours, judging by the appearance of that mountain. However, we'll hear and see more of it later on. Now, Andy, we are approaching the reef. Do you climb aloft and con the boat in through the channel."

This is the only practical method of entering an unbeaconed lagoon, for owing to the sudden increase in depth, a lead line is of little use. On the other hand, the extreme clearness of the water makes it possible for a man aloft to detect instantly any rocks or shoals that lurk beneath the surface.

For the space of five minutes it was an anxious time. On either hand the breakers thrashed themselves in masses of milk-white foam upon the glistening coral reef, while ahead a narrow patch of undulating, yet unbroken water showed the presence of the only available channel into the shelter of the lagoon.

"Starboard — bear away — starboard again — port, steady!"

Under the light breeze the yawl was in danger of dropping to leeward upon the merciless rocks. One moment her stern was lifted high in the air, the rudder consequently being useless. The next she threw her streaming bows above the following wave, then, shaving the edge of the reef by a bare five yards, the little vessel glided into the quiet waters of the anchorage.

The crew now had time to look about them. Drawn up on the sandy beach were seven large canoes, similar to that which had paid an unwelcome visit to McKay's Island, while others, only slightly smaller in size, were hauled up beneath the shelter of the bushes, their lofty carved prows alone being visible.

The beach was lined with natives, numbering at least 180 men, besides a host of women and children.

The men were of medium stature, muscular, and well built. In colour they resembled that of Quexo, being considerably lighter than the natives of New Guinea. Many of them bore scars, possibly self-inflicted or the result of inter-tribal wars.

"Stand by to let go!" shouted Andy to Terence and Ellerton. Then, as the yawl shot up into the wind, he followed up with: "Let go!"

With a roar and rattle of chain the anchor plunged to the bottom of the lagoon, and as the crew prepared to lower and stow the sails, Mr. McKay waved his arm towards the crowded shore.

"Well, lads," he exclaimed, "what do you think of our allies?"

CHAPTER XI

THE FRUSTRATED SACRIFICE

"A RUM-LOOKING crowd," observed Terence. "They look as if they could do a lot of damage, though."

"Yes," replied Mr. McKay, "I am sure of it. These fellows often fight for fighting's sake, and a pretty spectacle they make of it at times. I've seen them at it before."

"What, these natives?"

"No, the inhabitants of New Guinea. They are strongly associated, however, not only in manners and customs, but in language. I must polish up my Polynesian lingo, though after acquiring a smattering of Spanish I'm afraid I've become very rusty. Come, now, hurry up and snug down, and we'll go ashore."

"Armed, of course?"

"Yes, certainly. Take your revolvers only. I don't think we need fear anything at present. If there's to be trouble it will be after the natives have made the best use of us."

Accordingly the little crew worked with a will; then, directly the canvas was stowed and a second anchor laid out, the whole party went ashore.

They were received with great show of goodwill, the natives crowding round them with shouts of welcome, while the ceremony of rubbing noses was duly performed.

Several of the women advanced bearing long garlands, and, to the undisguised bashfulness of the three lads, placed the flowing chains round the necks of their visitors. Quexo, however, was denied that honour. He was a coloured man, and therefore, in the eyes of the natives, of no consequence.

"You made a quick passage, boss, after all," observed Blight.

"Aye, we picked up with a breeze," replied Mr. McKay, though he did not offer to explain when the breeze was encountered.

"They've prepared a feast for you," continued the ex-pearler. "So let's put our best foot foremost."

At a short distance from the shore was a large clearing, temporary huts made of branches and leaves of palm trees being erected in a vast double circle. Here a number of natives were busy baking pigs and fowls, while there was an abundance of yams and cocoanuts.

"They are very improvident with their supplies," remarked Andy. "They evidently seem as if they are certain of returning to the land of plenty."

"Yes," replied his father, who had taken an early opportunity of examining the roasted pigs to make sure they were pigs. "We may as well set-to and enjoy their hospitality; now, keep close together and see that your pistols are easy to draw."

The chiefs, each distinguishable by his huge mop of greased and frizzed hair, had squatted in a semicircle, and no sooner had the guests seated themselves than there was a terrific scramble on the part of the native chiefs to help themselves.

"We must forget for the moment that we are civilised and follow their example," remarked Mr. McKay, seizing a bit of pork in his fingers.

His companions did likewise, and notwithstanding the

absence of knives and forks they managed to eat and enjoy their share of the feast.

This done, there was a war-dance performed by the young men of the tribe, the warriors brandishing their clubs with such energy that it seemed wonderful that no one was hurt.

The natives did not appear to use their heavy clubs for the purpose of knocking their imaginary adversaries over the head; instead, they utilised the upward swing of their arms, lunging with the weapon on its upward stroke.

Andy particularly noticed this, and remarked it to his father.

"Yes," was the reply. "It's a favourite 'knock-out' blow with these fellows. I've seen them at it in actual combat. The idea is to get underneath their antagonist's guard, and strike him on the chin with the upward sweep of the club, and knock him senseless. Afterwards the winning side secure those who are only stunned and——"

"And what?"

"Eat them!"

At length the display came to an end, and the guests prepared to return on board. Mr. McKay had attempted to converse with some of the chiefs, but the result was a failure. He therefore told Blight to inform the chief that an early start was to be made on the morrow.

The news was received with redoubled shouts of delight, and the entire population escorted the white men to the beach. Nor did they stop there, for men, women, and children rushed headlong into the sea, and formed a huge bodyguard of swimmers till the yawl was reached.

All round the boat the water was black with the heads and arms of the swimmers, for these natives of the Pacific Islands take to the water often before they can walk.

Splashing and shouting loud enough to scare every shark within a mile, they swam round and round the yawl, none offering to climb aboard, till at a shout from one of the chiefs they turned and swam rapidly to the shore.

"We must set watches to-night, I suppose?" asked Andy.

"Certainly! Although these people are supposed to be our friends, we must imagine ourselves in hostile waters. I remember once that a small schooner put into Niihau. The natives came off to barter, and appeared to be extremely friendly. During the night about a couple of hundred swam off to the schooner and took her crew entirely by surprise. We found the charred remains of her timbers about a month afterwards, but not a trace of her unfortunate crew. They had been made into 'big pig.'"

"What's that?" asked Ellerton.

"Otherwise killed, roasted, and eaten."

"Then what happened?"

"The usual. Gunboat, landing party, etc. The village was shelled and burnt, and the island afterwards annexed to the Empire. So, you see, we must exercise due caution, although I don't want to upset your nerves."

It must have been shortly after midnight when the crew was awakened by a warning shout from Terence. Turning out of their comfortable bunks, the others rushed from the cabin, armed in anticipation of a sudden and treacherous attack.

A low rumbling greeted their ears, the sound apparently coming from the shore. For more than a minute the mysterious sound continued, then it suddenly ceased.

"What is it?" asked Donald.

"I'm afraid I cannot tell you," replied his father. "It's rather like the sound of a submarine explosion; probably a volcanic eruption."

Again the noise was repeated, yet no agitation of the placid water took place. The natives did not appear to be disturbed, for no commotion due to human agency could be heard from the island. This time the rumbling continued for quite five minutes, dying away in a succession of long-drawn tremors. Then all was quiet.

"I can't make it out," remarked Mr. McKay. "Whatever it is it seems to be accepted by the natives without a protest. To-morrow I'll inquire."

The party remained on deck for nearly an hour, but as the mysterious noise was not repeated, they at length retired to the cabin, leaving Terence to continue the remainder of his watch.

Just after sunrise Ellerton called Mr. McKay's attention to something on the beach. Seizing his glasses, the elder man brought them to bear upon the spot, and the next moment he exclaimed :

"Come on, lads, get your arms and row ashore as hard as you can."

Without waiting for an explanation, the three lads jumped into the boat, Mr. McKay taking his place in the stern sheets.

"Don't look ahead ; keep your eyes on the boat and pull," said Mr. McKay quietly, yet there was a grim, determined expression on his face that betokened trouble ahead.

The moment the little craft touched the beach the lads jumped out, and led by Mr. McKay, they made their way at top speed along the sandy shore.

Fifty yards from where they landed was the chief's canoe, which had been hauled up on shore since the previous night. At regular intervals betwixt its lofty prow and the water were six dark objects lying on the sand.

The lads gave a gasp of horror, for lashed firmly to

bamboo poles were six natives. Their fellows were preparing to launch the canoe over their bodies.

"Stop that!" shouted Mr. McKay sternly, holding up his hand to arrest the progress of the heavy craft, which was quivering under the grasp of fifty stalwart blacks.

The natives hesitated, glaring at the interrupters of their ceremony, while some of the chiefs made signs for the interfering strangers to stand aside.

"Where's Blight?" shouted Mr. McKay, as he opened the cut-off of the magazine of his rifle.

"Here I am, boss," replied that individual, coolly sauntering forward.

"Tell them to knock off this horrible business."

"Let 'em carry on, boss," was the reply, almost apologetic. "You see, they ain't got no prisoners, and the chief's canoe must be launched in this 'ere way, else it's bad luck. So they picked on some of their least wanted pals. Bless me, you'll soon get used to it. I did years ago."

"You can tell them from me that the moment that canoe moves we'll open fire. You might also explain that if our wishes are not carried out, we'll go back to our own island, and those rascals can stay here to starve. Now be quick, and let them know we mean business. Cover these tow-headed rogues," he continued to his companions. "If I give the word, let fly continuous volleys till the rest of the rascals bolt."

Evidently the chiefs knew the power of the white men's rifles, for they stepped back a few paces. Some of their followers grasped their clubs and spears, and courageously awaited their leaders' orders.

Jimmy Blight spoke rapidly. At first his words seemed to enrage the chiefs, but finally they expostulated.

"What do they say?"

"They are willing to let the brutes free if you promise that your power'll keep off the—the—you know what I mean, boss, the——"

"Evil eye?" suggested Mr. McKay.

"Aye, that's it."

"You can tell them that there's nothing to fear on that score. Let them know that six men alive are worth something, and that six squashed to a pulp will do them no earthly good."

Once again Blight turned to the half-pacified chiefs, a rapid exchange of words followed, and in the end the latter signed to their people to free the captives from their terrible position.

"That's over, thank God!" ejaculated Mr. McKay with intense fervour. "Tell the chiefs I'm going to make them a present," and putting his rifle to his shoulder he fired six shots in the air in rapid succession.

Astonishment held the natives spell-bound; they had never before seen a magazine rifle discharged. The sharp "crack" of the weapon, its smokelessness, and the peculiar screech of the nickel bullets filled them with awe, and with great hesitation they accepted the six empty cartridge-cases as an exchange for the release of the intended victims.

"They've given you a tally, boss," observed Blight. "They call you 'The Wonder that Breathes Fire.'"

"I hope they will bear it in mind then," replied Mr. McKay. "Now let them proceed with the launching operations. When all is ready we will set sail. By the by, what was that noise we heard last night?" he inquired, turning to the ex-pearler.

"Noise! What noise, boss?"

"A kind of prolonged roar of distant thunder. Twice it occurred."

"Oh! I know what you mean. We don't take no

notice of it in these parts. It's the 'Barking Sands.' See yon hills ? " —pointing to a ridge of sand dunes about sixty feet in height. " The stuff's slippery like, and often it rolls down, and makes a row. There's a sight of other islands about here like it."

Half-an-hour later a flotilla of nine canoes, crowded with armed natives, paddled slowly towards the entrance of the lagoon. As they passed the white men's craft, their paddles rose in the air to the accompaniment of a sonorous salute.

Then, as the dripping anchor rose clear of the water, the breeze filled the sails of the yawl, and she, too, started to play her part in the hazardous enterprise.

Another five hours would decide whether Ahii would fall into the hands of its former possessors, and, what was still more important, the fate of the little band from McKay's Island.

CHAPTER XII

AT BAY

ONCE clear of the reef, the canoes ceased paddling, and the brown cocoa-fibre sails were hoisted.

The yawl, by reason of her superior spread of canvas, soon forged ahead till, drawing in line with the largest canoe, in which were Blight and the head man of the tribe, the speed was regulated so as to keep within hailing distance of the ex-pearler.

Mr. McKay had already been given a rough chart of the island of Ahii. Like their own island and Ni Atong, Ahii was surrounded by a reef, only that on the eastern side the rocky barrier practically touched the shore. There were four large passages through the reef, two on the southern side—which they were approaching—one on the western, and the fourth on the northern.

The summit of Ahii was clearly visible from Ni Atong, and as the flotilla neared the island its peculiarities could be gradually discerned. It was considerably larger than McKay's Island, and composed chiefly of a dark brown rock, its flat portions covered with verdure. The general outline resembled a saddle, the higher of the two peaks being over two thousand feet above the sea.

But in place of the glistening sands of McKay's Island there was a beach of black sand, apparently the ground-up deposit of lava, for from the lower of the two peaks a

THE CHIEF'S CANOE WAS PADDLED SLOWLY TOWARDS THE SHORE

To face page 103.

thin cloud of smoke was emitted, showing that Ahii was still an active volcano.

At the western termination of the beach was perceived the entrance to a small creek, while beyond this opening low, dark-coloured cliffs rose sheer from the sea.

The approach of the invaders was observed long before the flotilla reached the entrance of the lagoon, and by the aid of their telescopes and field-glasses the crew of the yawl saw that the beach was lined with warriors, armed with formidable beak-headed clubs, long spears and oblong shields, the natives being bedecked with barbaric finery and plentifully bedaubed with paint and ochre.

"That's their boat harbour," shouted Blight, pointing to the creek. "Their canoes are drawn up on the banks about half-a-mile up the river. The village is on the port side. Shall I tell our men to push right in and burn their blessed canoes ?"

"No," replied Mr. McKay. "I don't want unnecessary violence ; besides, if their canoes are destroyed, how can they leave the island ? Let our boats remain about two hundred yards from shore. You will then stand in the chief's canoe and tell the natives to clear out. Say that we give them till midday. Otherwise we must open fire on them."

"Then you don't want these fellows to have a set-to ?"

"No ! No bloodshed unless it cannot possibly be avoided. Now carry on and we'll be ready to open fire to cover your retreat if they give trouble."

Blight could not but obey. The chief's canoe was paddled slowly towards the shore, the natives regarding the late inhabitants of Ahii with contemptuous gestures not unmingled with curiosity. They expected a mad rush, a fierce conflict on the shore, and an easy victory ; but the apparently timorous approach of a solitary canoe mystified them.

The ex-pearler stood up and shouted to the hostile chiefs. Whether he gave Mr. McKay's message in a conciliatory manner the Australian was not in a position to ascertain. More than likely, Blight, with a white man's contempt for "niggers," put his own construction upon the request, for before he had spoken half-a-dozen sentences there was a blood-curdling yell, and a shower of stones was hurled at the canoe.

The crew paddled out of range, while their companions, with loud counter-shouts of defiance, urged their boat to the attack, till by dint of much hand-waving Mr. McKay kept them temporarily in check.

"They've asked us to come ashore and be made into 'big pig,'" shouted Blight. "Shall we let our men loose?"

"Not here," replied Mr. McKay. "Paddle along the shore and we'll make a landing as far from the village as possible. That will give the enemy a chance to clear out if they get the worst of it."

Headed by the yawl, the little fleet kept parallel with the shore, a crowd of about two thousand armed savages keeping pace with the invaders, yelling, dancing, brandishing their weapons, and hurling the direst insults of which the natives were capable at their apparently inferior enemies.

"It must be a sharp lesson, lads," observed Mr. McKay. "What wouldn't I give for a Maxim or an automatic Colt. Ellerton, you take the helm and keep the boat just so, no nearer to shore."

The flotilla was now abreast of that part of the beach that was terminated by the cliffs. Here the flat shore consisted of a wedge-shaped piece of ground, so narrow that the enemy was unable to take due advantage of its superiority in numbers. The rapid fire of four magazine rifles would play havoc with the dense serried ranks of

bronzed and painted warriors, but still Mr. McKay refrained from making the first advance.

"Let them fight it out between themselves," he shouted to Blight, who, however eager he was to send the natives to the fight, did not show any strong inclination to lead them. "We'll open fire if our fellows get the worst of it."

It was plainly impossible to keep the invaders in hand. With a roar of defiance that momentarily drowned the yells of their more numerous adversaries, the natives urged their canoes towards the shore.

Then, as craft after craft grounded upon the beach, their crews dropped paddles, grasped their clubs and spears, and plunged waist deep into the water.

It was a veritable struggle between a host of bronzed paladins.

Clubs met with a loud and ponderous clang, spears met shields or else found a softer billet, while those of the defenders of the island who could not gain the van hurled enormous stones over the heads of their foremost ranks at their vindictive foes.

Above the shouts of the combatants could be heard the shrieks of the desperately wounded.

Several received serious wounds on both sides, yet save in extreme cases, they bore their hurts bravely, returning to the fray with the utmost determination, till failing strength caused them to drop, still fighting so long as they could wield a club or thrust with a spear.

Twice the rightful inhabitants of Ahii gained a footing on the shore, and twice were they swept back by the weight of numbers, for as fast as one of the defenders fell, another filled his place, while on the other hand the invaders had no reserves. True, there were the white men, but it was impossible to wield a rifle without serious consequence to friend as well as foe.

"How these fellows fight!" exclaimed Andy. "They simply won't give way; they'll be exterminated."

"It's fighting for fighting's sake," replied his father. "We must chip in or we'll find ourselves opposed to the whole island without a native to help us. Luff her up, Ellerton. That's right; now keep her as she is."

The yawl moved slowly in the opposite direction to her previous course, though still parallel with the shore. By this means the scene of the actual struggle was passed and only the serried rearguard of the defenders was abeam.

"Now, lads, aim low!"

The four rifles opened a rapid fire. It seemed like butchery, yet, as Mr. McKay had said, there was no alternative. Twenty human beings cannot stop a modern rifle-bullet fired at one hundred yards' range.

The defence seemed to melt away, and with redoubled shouts of triumph the friendly natives started in pursuit of the fugitives, knocking over the head all who were overtaken.

"If those fellows won't keep in hand, they will be in danger of being cut off," exclaimed Mr. McKay. "We must follow our friends up. Ellerton, you stay on board, and keep our craft underway."

Hurriedly the two McKays, Terence, and Quexo jumped into the tender, rowed ashore, and followed the ghastly trail of the victorious natives.

It was a hazardous undertaking, for some of the fugitives had fled inland instead of following their main body in their retreat upon the village. At any moment these might rally and fall upon the little band of white men, the dense scrub being favourable for such tactics.

There was no sign of Jimmy Blight. He had not accompanied the natives in their first attack, although he was known to have been in the chief's canoe, nor had he made his appearance when the white party landed.

"Keep a bright look-out, lads," cautioned Mr. McKay. "Have your revolvers ready. They are more serviceable than rifles here."

At almost every yard of the way lay natives either dead or grievously wounded. Many of the latter were bold enough to attempt to rise and threaten the white men. So far as possible, the wounded were ignored, greatly to their surprise, for a savage rarely gives and never expects quarter.

Once or twice, however, a warrior would spring to his feet after the white men had passed, and with his remaining energy throw his club or spear at his enemies. In that case it became necessary to silence the desperate native for ever.

Suddenly from the shelter of a dense belt of scrub three powerful blacks dashed upon Quexo, who had strayed a few yards behind the rest of the party.

The mulatto raised his revolver and fired, and a huge native sprang a good three feet in the air and tumbled on his face. But ere Quexo could repeat his shot a triple-barbed spear pierced his shoulder. He fell, the weapon still embedded in his flesh.

The man who had thrown the lance drew a stone knife, and threw himself upon the prostrate mulatto, while the third native raised his club to complete the business.

With admirable presence of mind Quexo shot the man with the club, who in his fall completely covered the hapless mulatto.

Alarmed by the first shot, Mr. McKay and the two

lads ran to the aid of their companion, but ere they emerged from the bush a third shot rang out, and the savage who had hurled the spear at the mulatto fell shot through the head.

Then as Andy rushed to the spot where Quexo lay, Jimmy Blight stepped from the cover of a group of palm trees.

"Not a bad shot, eh, boss?" he exclaimed, as he thrust fresh cartridges into his revolver. "You'd best get your young fellow on board as quick as you can, I reckon."

Quexo was groaning dismally, now the actual struggle was over. The triple spear-head had made a ghastly wound in his shoulder, for in his fall the haft had broken off short. Mr. McKay managed to extract it skilfully.

In the midst of their misfortunes the roar of the combatants came nearer and nearer. The enemy had rallied; the savages were driving back their attackers. Already men were streaming by, flying for their lives.

"Guess we'd best hook it," exclaimed Blight.

"Bear a hand, Andy," said his father, as he pointed to his helpless servant.

"Don't be a fool, boss!" shouted the ex-pearler, who was already beginning to retire. "He's about done for, and we'll be the same if we stop. Come along!"

"Not I," replied Mr. McKay sturdily. "You go if you want to. Come on, Andy, move him across to yonder thicket. We'll make a last stand here if it comes to the worst."

Something in Mr. McKay's reply must have appealed to the better nature of this low-down specimen of the white race, for, turning swiftly on his heel, he returned.

Kneeling beside the unconscious man he helped himself to his bandolier, revolver, and rifle.

Without another word the four men lifted Quexo to the shelter of the trees, and quietly and resolutely made ready to receive the horde of triumphant savages.

CHAPTER XIII

ELLERTON TO THE RESCUE

ALREADY the last of the fugitives had passed, rushing blindly for the shelter of their canoes, and the foremost of their pursuers were emerging from the clearing.

Mr. McKay, cool in the time of extreme peril, calculated that only about a hundred of their allies remained alive, while, making due allowance for the tremendous execution, there were at least a thousand bloodthirsty foes. Four against a thousand!

"Don't fire yet!" he whispered.

The main body of the savages crossed the clearing at breakneck rate, and disappeared in the direction of the beach, but others came at a more leisurely pace, examining those of the fugitives who had fallen. Those who showed signs of life were bound hand and foot, for what purpose the white men had no doubt whatever.

Presently the keen eye of one of the savages caught a glimpse of one of the rifle barrels. The man was evidently a chief, for, in addition to his coat of paint, he wore a short cloak of feathers.

Without a moment's hesitation the savage uttered a loud shout and ran straight in the direction of the white men, followed, at a distance of about twenty paces, by some fifty yelling natives.

"You take that fellow, Blight!" exclaimed Mr. McKay quietly.

Blight raised his rifle to his shoulder, took a sight in the centre of the chief's broad chest, and pressed the trigger.

"Missed, by smoke!" he cried, for the man came on steadily.

It was the work of a few seconds to open and close the bolt of the rifle, and in that time the chief still ran on; but before Blight could discharge his weapon a second time, the native's knees appeared to give way, and he pitched headlong on his face.

All four men were firing fast into the hostile press. The rush was stopped, although some of the savages came near enough to hurl their spears, several of which stuck in the trunks of the palm trees behind which the little band took shelter.

Many of the attackers fled for safety, others did not deign to run, but retired slowly, brandishing their weapons at their enemies as they did so. Some paid for their rashness, for it was a case of fighting for existence, and every native put out of action told.

"The beggars are going to corral us," exclaimed Blight. "See, they are running round to our left."

A couple of volleys drove the natives back still farther, yet without attempting to take cover they continued their tactics of trying to cut off their enemies' retreat.

The South Sea Islanders rarely resort to strategy in actual fighting. They may, indeed, take steps to surround their enemies, and then charge fearlessly to close quarters.

The white men were even now surrounded, for the advanced body, having failed to prevent the embarkation of the discomfited invaders, had been attracted by the sound of the firing and had completed the hostile cordon.

In the lull that ensued, Mr. McKay contrived to place a temporary bandage over Quexo's shoulder. The mulatto was still unconscious, but showed no symptoms of having been poisoned by the spear thrust.

"I wonder what Hoppy is doing?" remarked Terence, after moistening his parched lips with a draught from his water-bottle. "I guess he's in a terrible stew."

"He may manage to make our friends attempt another attack. If so, we can bolt for the shore; though I'm not going to put much faith in that," replied Mr. McKay. "They've had too much of a licking, I fancy."

"Pity you didn't let us burn those blessed canoes, boss; these black rascals will be able to follow our craft now."

"Yes, I admit I erred on the side of mercy, Mr. Blight," was the reply. "It's my fault, and I must take the blame."

"That comes o' being so mighty particular," retorted the ex-pearler bluntly. "If we come out o' this I guess your opinion of a nigger will have an almighty change. Now, stand by, for here they come."

"Don't be taken alive, lads," continued Mr. McKay, and the next instant the rifle-fire reopened.

Upon the dense masses of natives every shot told, yet having only one rifle for each front the fire was not sufficiently extended to keep the advancing enemy at bay.

The air was filled with shouts and shrieks, while stones and spears flew in deadly showers. Once the magazines were empty there was no time to recharge. The heated rifles were flung aside and the revolvers were brought into use.

The four men shot rapidly and well, the heavy lead bullets stopping the headlong rush far more effectively than did the nickel rifle ammunition.

Once again the attack failed, the savages drawing off and leaving at least fifty of their number dead or wounded on the field. Not one of the enemy had got within twenty yards of the death-dealing weapons of the white men.

"Now, boss," gasped Blight, as he bound a discoloured silk handkerchief round a spear-scratch on his left wrist.

"Shall we make a bolt for it? We can fight our way to the shore."

Mr. McKay pointed to the still unconscious Quexo.

"Put a bullet through his head. He won't feel it. Why should we chuck away our chance for a wounded nigger?"

"Look here, Mr. Blight, I've told you before you can go if you want to. Here are two revolvers you can take; there's a good chance now, so go, and good luck to you! I must stay here—what do you say, lads?"

Terence and Andy grimly signified their intention of remaining with their stricken comrade.

Blight saw there was a chance, but, in his opinion, far from a good one.

Although the spot the little band had chosen for their stand was within a hundred yards of the sea, to return to where the canoes had landed their armed contents was at least a quarter of a mile distant.

Then, again, directly he left cover and began to run, a hundred natives would join in the pursuit. Even could he manage to fight his way through the ring and outstrip his pursuers, there was a long swim in front of him.

Good swimmer though he was, Blight recognised that he was decidedly inferior in speed to the amphibious natives.

"I see it's no go, boss," he exclaimed. "So let's stick at it to the end. Come on, you black fiends!" he added, shaking his fist at the dark masses of warriors, as they prepared to renew the attack.

"Don't waste a single shot," cautioned Mr. McKay. "Here's the main attack, so direct a combined fire in that direction, till they get within fifty yards. Then each man must look to his front and do his best."

The words were scarcely spoken ere the fierce yells of the savages redoubled, and the rush began.

Scorning to take advantage of the slightest bit of cover,

they raced furiously, leaping over the low scrub that would have stopped a civilised race.

Then the rattle of the rifle-fire rose above the shouts of the natives. Scores were hit, some falling on the spot, others running several yards ere their strength failed, while many of the wounded, in their mad thirst for vengeance, staggered after their comrades in an endeavour to launch themselves upon the white men.

No longer was there need to raise rifle to shoulder. Firing from the hip, the little knot of desperate men emptied their magazines into the throng of natives, then, casting aside their rifles, as before, they grasped their revolvers, hardly daring to hope to check the headlong rush.

Suddenly to an accompaniment of a peculiar screech, a trail of thin smoke flashed earthwards from the sky. Then, with a terrific report, an explosion took place right in the middle of the surging pack of savages, and ere the cloud of dense, suffocating smoke cleared away, the natives fled in all directions. Some, indeed, were so terrified that they fell flat on their faces, clapping their hands to their ears to shut out the echoes of the thunderous report.

Those who were on the remote side of the encircling body of natives, though far from the scene of the explosion, were also seized with panic, and the whole crowd, save those who had been hit or were too dazed to move, fled helter-skelter for the village.

For a full minute none of the white men spoke. Terence and Andy looked with utter amazement at the retreating foes; Mr. McKay and Blight, more hardened in peril, seized the opportunity to thrust fresh clips of cartridges into their magazines.

"Guess a gunboat's been dropping a shell," observed Blight, who was the first to break the long-drawn silence.

"You are wrong," replied Mr. McKay quietly. "A shell would never throw out a cloud of smoke like that; it's not the colour of lyddite either."

"Then what is it? Who fired it?"

"Young Ellerton," was the astonishing reply.

Mr. McKay was correct in his surmise. Ellerton, on seeing his companions start in support of their coloured allies, was not altogether at his ease. He kept tacking the yawl, so as to be within easy distance of the landing-place in case of a hasty retreat on the part of the invaders.

Gradually the sounds of the running fight died away; but no report of firearms served to show that the white men had got in touch with their foes.

Seen from seaward the scrub seemed almost so thick as to be impassable. Mr. McKay and his companions were literally swallowed up in the trackless waste that lay beyond the low range of cliffs.

Ellerton looked around at the canoes. Beyond a man left in each as a boat-keeper they were deserted. Blight had vanished; when and where the young Englishman knew not.

Suddenly the distant report of a revolver burst upon his ears. He knew it to be a pistol shot, for it had not the short, sharp crack of a rifle. That meant foes at close quarters. Then came two other reports in quick succession, followed by a prolonged silence.

The firing reassured him. He realised that his friends were not with their savage allies, and that they were, in consequence, between the village and the beach. Rightly enough he guessed that they were dealing with a party of stragglers, the noise of only three shots and the absence of rifle-fire showed that the conflict was brief and decisive.

The youth tacked once more, and steered eastward

along the beach. Again the long silence filled him with a nameless anxiety. He regretted the evil day when Blight and the natives came to McKay's Island; but in the circumstances nothing else could be done. They had put their hand to the plough; there was no turning back.

Then, gradually but surely, came the sound of the natives still engaged in conflict, unaccompanied by the report of firearms. There was no mistaking it. Their allies were being driven back; but where were the white men?

Nearer and nearer came the sounds of the retreating natives and their pursuers, till the foremost of the fugitives gained the shore. Jumping into their canoes they pushed off, panic-stricken and utterly fatigued. Then came the main body, a sorry remnant at most, grimly fighting their foes at almost every step.

Waist deep in water they fought, till the survivors contrived to escape in their boats. Two canoes were left unmanned, their solitary occupants paddling laboriously out of the reach of their foes.

Nor did the pursuit cease at the water's edge, for several of the enemy dashed boldly into the waves and swam after the retreating craft.

One of the latter was, indeed, overtaken, and a desperate struggle ensued between the rival natives, till the crew of another canoe, seeing their companions' plight, returned and saved them from being wiped out.

Then the flotilla moved well out into the lagoon, and took up a position beyond the yawl, the natives, many of them badly wounded, being too exhausted to paddle another stroke.

Ellerton was now confronted with a real peril. His friends, if alive, were cut off; he was unable to gather

any tidings from the natives, who replied to his gestures by grunts and meaningless exclamations.

Just then came the rattle of musketry. At all events, Mr. McKay and his party were still in a position to offer resistance, but against what odds ?

Just then the wind, hitherto light, died utterly away. Ellerton knew nothing about the motor, and he himself was now in a position of peril. Unable to move, save by using a sweep, which was hard work, he was at the mercy of the savages, who, lining the shore, had realised his predicament, and were preparing to swim off and carry the yawl by storm.

Ellerton had plenty of rifles and revolvers, but even then he could not hope to keep the mob of foes at bay.

Seizing a rifle, he sprang upon the cabin-top and opened fire. It was a fairly long range—some six hundred yards—but Ellerton gauged the distance to a nicety ; with the correct elevation, missing a man in that throng was about an impossibility. A commotion showed that the shot had taken effect. Another with equally good result ! Ellerton again felt the lust of battle.

Suddenly, in the midst of his cool and deliberate firing, a blow from the boom nearly knocked the youth overboard. The breeze had again sprung up.

Recovering himself by grasping the main shrouds, Ellerton laid his rifle on the deck and jumped into the cockpit. He meant to steer along the coast towards the village, and, if possible, aid his friends by a long, dropping fire.

His progress was slow, the wind being still light, and ere the yawl had travelled a hundred yards the firing on shore died away.

What did it mean ? He thought. Were his companions at length overwhelmed by dint of numbers ? If so he

would take revenge; he would cruise up and down the shore and blaze away so long as a savage remained on the beach, or a cartridge remained on board.

And after? He gave but a brief thought to that—a solitary existence on a boat far from the little island he regarded as his home—but the thought filled him with the rage of despair.

Steering by means of the tiller between his knees, Ellerton headed diagonally towards the shore, at the same time charging the magazines of half-a-dozen rifles.

While thus engaged, to his astonishment and delight the sound of firing was resumed, the scene of action being nearly abreast of where the yawl was steering. He immediately hove-to, and again ascending the cabin-top, looked ashore. The scrub and several small groves of cocoanut palms prevented him from seeing the combatants, and on this account he refrained from opening a dropping fire, for fear of harming his friends.

He was in a helpless state of perplexity till all at once a thought struck him which gave him new-born hope.

The night he and Andy kept watch on board, in the lagoon of McKay's Island, they had taken some rockets to use should they require assistance. These rockets were of the ordinary sea-pattern, making a loud explosion by means of a small charge of gun-cotton.

Hurriedly Ellerton fixed one of the rockets so that it would assume a curved flight instead of soaring upwards, then turning the vessel's course till the direction of the projectile would be as near as possible towards the scene of action, he discharged the novel weapon.

. . . . . .

"That was a lucky thought of yours, Ellerton, my boy," exclaimed Mr. McKay, when the little party was safely on board. "They scooted like rabbits. But, by Jove! it was a narrow squeak."

CHAPTER XIV

ROUTING THE SAVAGES

THERE was not the slightest doubt about it. The expedition had failed disastrously. Quexo was badly wounded, the white men all more or less exhausted, while barely forty utterly demoralised natives were cowering in their canoes.

"Well, we can't stay here," remarked Mr. McKay, after the mulatto's hurts had been dressed and the wounded man placed on one of the bunks. "They will be starting in pursuit, I'm thinking, and so, Mr. Blight, will you tell those black rascals to man two of their canoes and destroy the others? By that means we may be able to get the survivors back to Ni Atong."

Mr. McKay's opinion of the ex-pearler was undergoing a change. No doubt the man was a bit of a scoundrel, he thought, but he was older and possibly more of a reformed character than in the old days in Torres Strait. He had certainly fought well and had impressed the lads as a resolute and cautious combatant.

"I'll tell 'em, boss," he replied. "But, by snakes, it's a bad look-out."

"It is," assented Mr. McKay, as he prepared to go below and bind up a slight wound on his shoulder. "Your friends will have to be content with Ni Atong for a while, I'm thinking."

Andy was also in the cabin, where he was attending to

a surface wound on his forehead—the legacy of one of the savages' showers of stones—so only Terence and Ellerton remained on deck with the ex-pearler.

"Couldn't the boss bring over the rest of your pals and settle our score with those niggers?"

"What pals?" asked Terence, taken aback by the suddenness of the question.

"Why, the other chaps on your island."

"There are none," replied Terence.

Barely had the words escaped him, when he realised that he had made an admission. He had revealed the comparative weakness of the defences of McKay's Island.

"Oh! Is that so?" was the rejoinder.

Blight said no more on the subject, for the yawl was now within hailing distance of the forlorn flotilla.

The natives accepted their white companion's orders without demur. The two most serviceable canoes were brought up with their full complement, and the rest were scuttled till they floated awash—useless to friend or foe. Then with a light breeze the three craft—the yawl leading the forlorn procession—headed for the opening in the reef.

Jimmy Blight was thinking. He was not of a thinking nature, but scheming and plotting were the only intellectual subjects in which he excelled. In fact, he was a past master in the art of intrigue.

He briefly summed up the situation and enlarged upon it. His house and store at Ahii were in the hands of a hostile race of savages. His wealth of copra and other valuable native products had vanished.

Had his black friends been able to regain possession of Ahii, he would not have hesitated to incite them to fall treacherously upon the white men from McKay's Island, and the doubtless valuable stores of that place would be his. Now, with fewer than forty of his savage friends at his command, the risk was too great—at least at present.

No, he must wait his time, return to Ni Atong, and endeavour to find an opportunity of surprising and slaying the handful of whites. If only he dared! With a fully charged revolver he might make a sudden attack——

This wicked scheming was suddenly interrupted by a shout from one of the canoes. The keen-eyed savages had detected an ominous movement ashore. Their enemies were launching their canoes in pursuit of their discomfited adversaries.

"Say, boss!" exclaimed the ex-pearler, as Mr. McKay emerged from the little cabin. "What's to be done now? There ain't no wind, in a manner o' speaking, and those reptiles'll overhaul us hand over fist."

Mr. McKay did not reply at first, but anxiously scanned the shore with his glasses.

"There are seven canoes," he announced. "Three for us to tackle and two for each canoe. 'Tis long odds, but I reckon we'll come out on top."

"Why not get aboard the canoes, and let this 'ere packet go?" asked Blight. "There'll be more chance with the blacks using their paddles. It'll be a flat calm in a minute or so."

"No," replied Mr. McKay. "We'll fight it out as we are, though we've had quite enough for one day."

The crews of the two friendly canoes were still lying on their paddles, realising that their only hope was in remaining by the white man's boat. Their indifference had vanished, and weapons were brandished in a way that showed a grim determination to fight to the death.

"Tell them to paddle for all they are worth," exclaimed Mr. McKay.

"What for?" demanded Blight, his old aggressive manner beginning to return. "What's the use? Let's keep together, I vote."

"I mean to," replied Mr. McKay coolly. "Now do as I tell you."

Sullenly the ex-pearler obeyed, and the natives, plying their paddles to the accompaniment of a mournful chant, soon increased the distance between them and the almost becalmed yawl.

"Now, Andy, start the motor."

Great was Blight's astonishment as the engine began to purr, and the little craft shot through the water at a good eight knots. He had never seen an internal combustion engine before. Although motor-driven craft are common amongst the pearling and trading fleets in the Pacific, he had left the fishing-grounds some years before the first motor had made its appearance.

Nor was the wonder of the crews of the friendly canoes any the less. To them the white man's boat, vomiting clouds of vapour from the exhaust and producing a series of rapid explosions, was nothing more or less than a fiery-dragon.

"We are going the pace too much," remarked Andy, for the yawl was easily outdistancing the canoes, whose crews were showing signs of physical distress.

"Yes, we must stand by them," replied his father. "See, our pursuers are gaining; you are quite sure the motor is thoroughly tuned up, I hope?"

"Running like clockwork," was Andy's enthusiastic reply.

"Good! Now, lads, it's revolvers for this business. Get the canvas off her, then. Keep well under cover: I'm going to ram the leading canoe."

The sails were quickly stowed, and the bowsprit run in. The five men, revolvers in hand, kept in the cockpit so as to be sheltered by the raised roof of the cabin.

"Now, Ellerton, how's your nerve?"

"Perfectly fit."

"Then put your helm over when I give the word and strike yonder canoe square amidships."

The pursuers had trailed out in a long, straggling line, a couple of hundred yards separating the foremost from the second.

On they came, fearlessly. Ellerton could see the foam flying from the sharp prow, the muscular backs of the straining oarsmen, and hear the steady yet rapid thud of the paddles. Now he could discern the whites of the eyes of the fierce-looking warriors who were gathering in her lofty bows.

"Make due allowance for the way she carries," cautioned Mr. McKay. "Now, hard over!"

The youth at the helm put all his strength against the tiller. The yawl rolled outward as she turned, then recovering herself rushed straight for her gigantic antagonist.

With a yell of defiance the savages let fly a shower of arrows and stones. The masts and deck were literally bristling with darts, while the stones rolled like hail upon the planks.

Under the protection of the cabin-top the white men escaped the deadly volley, but Ellerton, gripping the tiller with a vice-like grip, felt a hot, stinging pain in his left arm.

Then, crash! Fair in the centre of the lightly-built fifty-feet hull struck the sharp stem. There was a terrific splintering of wood and the gurgling sound of inrushing water, while at the same time the fore part of the yawl was crowded with a score of black fiends.

Then the revolvers barked, and the living mob of savages melted away, and the next instant the yawl was ploughing her way over the shattered remains of the war-canoe.

"Hurrah!" shouted the crew. "Now for the next!"

CRASH! FAIR IN THE CENTRE OF THE LIGHTLY BUILT FIFTY-FEET HULL STRUCK THE SHARP STEM

To face page 124.

But the second canoe, profiting by her consort's misfortunes, turned and paddled rapidly back, to obtain the support of the third.

With a difference of barely one knot in speed the advantage of the motor-driven vessel was lost, so the crew had to be content to keep out of range of the arrows and pour in volleys from the rifles.

It was a stern lesson, but one that was absolutely necessary, for the remaining canoes turned tail and paddled hurriedly for the shore.

The sharp and short conflict was ended by the return of the two friendly canoes, whose crews, with true savage instinct, completed the work of destruction by spearing every man whose head remained above water.

"Capitally done, Ellerton!" exclaimed Mr. McKay. "You—— Why, what's the matter with the lad?"

The lad's face had turned a ghastly greyish hue, and only Andy's prompt action saved him from falling upon the grating of the cockpit.

"Look! He's hit!" said Andy, pointing to Ellerton's left arm, which had hitherto been concealed.

In a trice Mr. McKay cut away the wounded youth's shirt-sleeve. The arrow had gone through the fleshy part of his forearm, the barb projecting quite a couple of inches.

"Hold his arm as firmly as you can," said Mr. McKay.

Then, grasping the haft of the missile, he dexterously snapped it in two. In spite of his care and skill, the slight motion caused the lad to utter a groan; but the worst was still to come.

Lubricating the broken shaft with some cocoanut oil, Mr. McKay told Andy and Terence to hold Ellerton's arm tightly, so as to compress the veins and arteries, and consequently numb the limb. Then with a rapid and deliberate motion he laid hold of the barbed end and drew

the fragment of the missile through the wound. With a low moan Ellerton fainted.

"Couldn't be better," remarked Mr. McKay. "Now, lads, take him into the cabin, and start the stove as fast as you can. I'm afraid the arrow is poisoned."

Andy and Terence lifted their comrade upon one of the bunks opposite to that on which Quexo was peacefully slumbering. Mr. McKay had given the mulatto a strong sleeping draught; he now took up a rifle, and, withdrawing the cleaning rod, snapped it close to the "worm."

"You might take the helm, Blight," he remarked. "You know the course? I shall be busy for half an hour or so."

Blight nodded. Left alone, he gave a glimpse at the compass, put the tiller up till the vessel lay on her proper course, and motioned to the two canoes to follow.

Then he resumed his meditations. Everything seemed in his favour. Half a dozen revolvers, thrown down after the fight, were within hand's reach. In the cabin were two wounded persons and three totally unsuspecting unarmed men. And close by were the two canoes containing his coloured associates. What could be easier?

CHAPTER XV

A KNIFE-THRUST IN THE DARK

More than once Blight bent over the array of death-dealing weapons, but on each occasion his nerve failed him.

Accustomed as he was to deal swiftly with the natives, never hesitating to shoot down any black creature that thwarted him, he shrank from tackling his intended victims.

Not from feelings of compunction did he pause; he was a coward at heart, and the thought of a possible failure filled him with a horrible dread. So, nervously sawing at the tiller, he gnawed his lower lip and formed fresh plans for evil.

Meanwhile Mr. McKay, unconscious of his peril, proceeded with his preparations. He deeply regretted the fact that the case of surgical instruments salved from the *San Martin* was at that moment—like the Dutchman's anchor—left at home, or rather on McKay's Island. In the final hurry of embarkation that important item had been overlooked.

Grasping the glowing portion of the cleaning rod, Mr. McKay approached the unconscious lad. Once more telling the other two lads to hold the patient's arm firmly, he inserted the red-hot metal into the wound.

It was the work of a few seconds, but the operation of cauterising the wound was accomplished. Time alone

would tell whether this rude surgery was a success or not.

An hour later the low-lying island of Ni Atong was in sight, and just before sunset the yawl and her two native consorts entered the lagoon.

It was a pitiful home-coming. The miserable remnant of the fleet of canoes told the tale, and already the beach was lined with a crowd of wailing women and crying children, with a sprinkling of old men, whose services had been dispensed with on the fatal expedition.

The latter had good cause for being cast down.

In many of the Pacific Islands old age is looked upon as a useless qualification, and, failing a crowd of prisoners to serve as sacrifices and to appease the warriors' appetites, it was their aged and infirm fellow-tribesmen who were doomed to die to keep the angry gods good-tempered.

"Coming ashore, boss?" asked Blight, as if he did not care one way or the other. "I can give you a shake-down in my hut."

"I'm afraid we cannot manage it," was the reply. "You see, with our two patients it is out of the question."

"Well, well! Maybe it will be best, 'specially as them natives are going to have a bit of a bust-up to-night. You mayn't like it, though I'm used to it. When do you set sail for your own island?"

"To-morrow at dawn."

"Oh!"

Mr. McKay looked up sharply. There was a strange sound about that "Oh!" The ex-pearler realised that the exclamation was a weak expression of regret, and hastened to explain.

"I thought as how you would be wanting fresh water, 'specially for your two young chaps. Make a day of it, and have a spell ashore. One more day won't make no difference like."

"Possibly not," assented Mr. McKay.

"Then there are yams and plantains. They'll be rare good for feverish fellows. You're welcome, you know."

"I'll see what the others say. So now, Blight, my son can row you ashore."

"This is a present, isn't it, boss?" asked Blight, pointing to the revolver that he had used to such good purpose at Ahii.

"Certainly, I gave it you," was the reply.

"Thanks!"

Blight picked up the weapon and thrust it with assumed carelessness into his belt; then, bidding the crew of the yawl good night, he stepped into the dinghy.

Hardly had the sun set, than the wearied crew retired to the cabin for rest and refreshment.

Ellerton was awake, feverish, and at intervals in great pain. Quexo still slumbered. Andy and Terence were sleepily nodding their heads in an almost vain endeavour to keep awake.

Mr. McKay, though utterly done up, announced his intention of keeping watch on deck the moment he had finished supper.

Just as the moon rose, a blood-curdling roar came from the island. Instantly the two McKays and Terence rushed on deck. Fires gleamed in the centre of the wretched village, and around the flames danced a hundred natives, yelling, screaming, and invoking their idols.

"What are they up to, pater?" asked Andy, as his father scanned the shore with a pair of night-glasses. "Let me have a look when you've finished."

"You had better not," was the reply. "Take my word for it."

The lads understood. They were fairly well acquainted

with the hideous orgies that are practised on these islands.

"And to think we helped those villains," remarked Andy.

"Well," admitted his father, "it was, as I said before, the only course open to us. Now, I think all danger is past. They are not strong enough to attempt to seize our island, so we can go back with easy minds."

"I hope so," returned his son. "But my word, it's cost us something!"

"I can't understand that chap Blight," said Terence. "He seemed mighty curious to know how many of us lived on the island."

"You told him?"

"Yes! I let the cat out of the bag, I fear."

"You did?" replied Mr. McKay gravely. "I'm sorry; but perhaps there's no harm done. However, we'll set sail to-morrow morning in any case. I, for one, will not be sorry to say good-bye to Mr. Blight. Now, lads, you must turn in. I'll be all right here; and to-morrow, all being well, I'll make up arrears of sleep."

Left to himself, Mr. McKay sat in the cockpit and watched the orgies ashore till the fires died out and the sounds of the worshippers ceased. Half-an-hour later he appeared, to all intents and purposes, to be lying in the stern sheets fast asleep.

At about three in the morning the moon, now high in the heavens, threw her beams upon a strange drama.

Swimming with eel-like swiftness and silence towards the unguarded yawl came three men. Two were natives, the third a white man, and each had a glittering knife betwixt his teeth.

Grasping the boat's stern, Blight (for it was he) listened intently. Then, hearing only the sounds of deep slumber arising from the cabin, he cautiously placed his foot

over the bobstay, and with slow and stealthy movement hoisted himself clear of the water.

Having made sure that the deck was deserted, he climbed softly upon the fo'c'sle and proceeded to unfasten his revolver, which he had secured to the top of his head by means of a strip of cocoa fibre.

Presently he was joined by one of the natives, and at a short interval by the second. Creeping towards the open skylight the miscreant listened once more. The loud ticking of the cabin chronometer and the deep, regular breathing of the sleepers, alone broke the stillness.

Suddenly Blight perceived Mr. McKay's form lying with his head buried in his arm upon one of the seats of the cockpit. This was awkward. He raised his revolver, then reflected that ere he could reach the cabin after firing the fatal shot the occupants would be aroused.

Sprawling full length upon the cabin-top, Blight watched the slumbering victim with considerable misgivings, till realising that Mr. McKay was sound asleep, he raised himself upon his elbow, and beckoned to the two natives. Uplifting his knife, Blight made an imaginary thrust, then pointed meaningly towards the sleeper.

Just then a shark glided past the boat at barely an oar's length. Rising to the surface it turned on its back and snapped at some floating object. The sharp, almost metallic snap of those powerful jaws filled the would-be murderer with alarm. He realised that the sleeper might awake, and also that his own retreat was cut off.

The sweat poured in torrents from his brow and ran down his chalky cheeks. But the sleeping man stirred not.

Reassured, Blight again signed to the natives. Knife in hand the two glided along the narrow waterways, dropping noiselessly into the cockpit, and crept towards their unsuspecting prey.

Blight, revolver in hand, followed, stopping by the side of the cabin bulkhead, ready to dive into the cabin and complete the murderous business the moment the fatal blow was struck.

Like panthers the two natives launched themselves upon their victim, their knives flashed in the moonlight; the next instant they were buried to the hilt in the body of the sleeper.

Ere the weapons could be withdrawn, two shots rang out in quick succession. One of the natives fell face foremost across the coaming of the cockpit, the other gave a spring and plunged lifeless into the sea.

Then, before Blight could realise the sudden turn of affairs, he felt the contact of the muzzle of a smoking revolver against his temple.

"Hands up, Blight!" exclaimed Mr. McKay resolutely.

The would-be murderer's weapon fell from his nerveless grasp and immediately his hands were raised high above his head.

The noise of the firing had aroused the sleeping inmates of the cabin, and Andy, Terence, and even Ellerton rushed through the narrow doorway into the well.

"Get hold of a few pieces of lashing and secure the rascal," said Mr. McKay calmly.

"You are not hurt?" asked his son anxiously.

"Hurt? Not a bit of it. No thanks to this beauty, though. See!"

And, still keeping the weapon at the would-be assassin's head, he pointed to the made-up figure of himself, in which the hilts of the two knives glittered in the moonlight.

Andy and Terence lost no time in securing the ankles of the prisoner. Then ordering him to lower his hands, the lads deftly lashed his elbows together behind his back.

"So, Mr. James Blight, alias 'Chinese Pork,' I find your delightful character has undergone little change during the last twenty years. One would have thought that your unpleasant experiences in connection with the *Sea Belle*——"

"What d'ye mean?" gasped the prisoner, his eyes rolling heavily in his terror.

"I beg you not to interrupt. A connection with the *Sea Belle* would have taught anyone but an utter villain or a fool a lifelong lesson. I will pass over those minor affairs at Boni Harbour and Fortescue Strait, though by mentioning them you can realise that I know a good deal of your former career. What you've been doing since is of little consequence, though I'll wager that your existence will not bear investigation. Now, to complete your record, you've been caught in the act of attempting to treacherously slay your white—well, I won't say friends. Thanks to a merciful Providence, your schemes were thwarted. I am now going to keep you in custody till I can hand you over to justice at Brisbane, where you will have a fair trial and be allowed to answer to a number of various crimes."

Mr. McKay paused to note the effect of his accusation, then he continued:

"I am going to keep you a close prisoner in the fo'c'sle till we return to our island. You will then be kept in confinement ashore till such time as we are able to reach some island under the control of a recognised British governor. Have you anything to say?"

The ex-pearler maintained a sullen silence, and, without offering any resistance, he was carried into the fo'c'sle and locked in, there to meditate on the fate in store for him.

"Ellerton, go back to your bunk. You ought not to be here," exclaimed Mr. McKay.

"But I feel all right again," replied the youth.

"Probably you do, but with your arm in that state absolute rest is essential. So go. Andy, we've had enough of this island, so let's clap on all sail and shape a course for home."

In the moonlight the entrance through the reef was plainly visible. There was a favourable breeze, so that the yawl could lay on her course without having to tack.

As the anchor rose, a long-drawn chorus of shouts of rage came from the beach, and a swarm of arrows, all of which fell short, hurtled through the air.

"So much for our native allies," observed Mr. McKay. "They are all in the swim in this business. No matter, they can do us no harm."

To the accompaniment of a farewell shout of anger from the baffled inhabitants of Ni Atong, the yawl glided swiftly across the moonlit sea.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GALE

THROUGHOUT the night the stiff little craft gallantly breasted the waves, making a much better passage than she had done on her outward voyage, and at sunrise the highest peak of McKay's Island appeared above the horizon.

But with the rising of the sun the wind increased in force, and an hour later it was blowing half a gale, and dead astern.

Trembling on the crest of a huge wave, then sliding with a sickening sensation down the green slope into the trough, the little craft held on her course, steered by Andy's sinewy arm.

Mr. McKay, unable to keep his eyes open, lay deep in slumber upon one of the bunks.

Ellerton, propped up by cushions, was kept awake by the motion of the boat, every lurch causing his wound to pain horribly.

"Another couple of hours will find us home, Hoppy, old man," exclaimed Terence cheerily, as he entered the cabin. "But it does blow."

"So I should think," replied Ellerton. "But how is she behaving?"

"Like a cork; we've only had the tail end of a couple of seas aboard. Well, cheer up! Make yourself at home and wish you were," and with this pleasantry Terence returned to keep Andy company.

Each time the yawl breasted the summit of a wave, the peak of McKay's Island could be seen rearing its head above the waste of storm-tossed waters. Each time it did so it appeared to be getting nearer.

Andy knew that there was danger ahead, but he forebore to mention the fact to his chum.

The "back-wash" from the terrible reef, with its accompaniment of a tumble of dangerous cross-seas, had to be encountered, and the risky passage through the coral barrier made at all costs.

For half-an-hour more the seas, though high, were comparatively regular, but at the expiration of that time the dinghy, which was being towed astern, was filled by a vicious comber. The dead weight of the water-logged craft caused the stout painter to snap like pack-thread, and the next instant the tender was lost to view in the turmoil of foaming water.

"Can't we go back for her?" shouted Terence, for the howling of the wind made ordinary conversation inaudible.

"Impossible!" replied his chum. "She would be swamped before we hauled to the wind. Besides, the dinghy's done for."

"It's a rotten look-out. We shall miss her."

"Yes," assented Andy. "But it can't be helped. Look here, Terence, now we are going through a patch of broken water. I can see it a mile or so ahead. We may have a few seas on board, so lash yourself to this cleat and stand by with the bucket. You may have to bale for all you're worth."

Terence closed the cabin-doors. Fortunately they were close-fitting and comparatively watertight; but, on the other hand, the cockpit was not a self-emptying one. Whatever quantity of water broke over had to be baled out.

"We'll have one of those cans of kerosene out of that locker," continued Andy.

"Going to start the motor?"

"No; to throw oil on the sea. Kerosene's not very heavy, but it's all we have. Now, stand by, here it comes."

Only a mile now separated the yawl from the entrance to the lagoon of McKay's Island, but every yard of that mile was beset with dangers.

Andy gripped the tiller, and braced himself for the ordeal. He had been the chief workman in the task of converting the boat into her present form, and now his handiwork was to be put to the test. A faulty piece of wood, a defective screw, an unsound rope—and their lives would have to answer for it.

With a dull roar a white-crested wave broke over the fore-deck, burying the little yawl as far as the mainmast; then ere she could recover herself another comber came like a cataract over the lee quarter. Well it was that both lads had taken the precaution of lashing themselves on, otherwise they might have been swept clean out of the well.

Andy, wellnigh breathless—for he had been hit in the side by the tiller as the boat attempted to broach to—retained sufficient presence of mind to thrust the helm up and enable the craft to meet the next following wave stern on.

"Bale!" he shouted. "Bale for your life!" and seizing the kerosene can that was floating from side to side of the cockpit, he splayed a quantity of oil over each quarter.

Terence, who was thrown in every direction as far as his tether would allow, struggled manfully with the bucket, but could hardly cope with the frequent showers of spray that literally played over the boat from every point of the compass

The helmsman noticed, with feelings of deepest concern, that the yawl had made considerable headway since entering the zone of broken water, and it would be touch-and-go whether they could avoid being carried on to the lee side of the coral reef.

It was now nearly high tide, and the cruel ridges were covered, although in the trough of the heavier waves the jagged lines of glistening coral showed themselves above the smother of foam.

Andy tried his best to keep the boat's head towards the channel, but in vain. She had lost ground, and was driving straight for the reef. One chance alone remained. He must put the yawl about and endeavour to claw-off the treacherous reef.

Like a top the little craft responded to the shift of the helm. For a few brief seconds the reefed head-sail slatted violently in the howling wind; then, to the accompaniment of another tremendous sea, the yawl staggered on her fresh course.

Andy's idea was to sail round to the lee side of the island and cruise about in the shelter of the reef till the gale moderated; but a few moments sufficed to show him that the spread of canvas—already as much as the vessel could carry—was not sufficient to take her to windward. She was drifting broadside on to the reef.

"Quick, Terry!" he shouted. "Tell them to stand by and make a rush directly you open the cabin door. The yawl's done for. She'll be smashed to splinters in five minutes."

Mr. McKay received the appalling intelligence fairly calmly. He at once proceeded to fasten a lifebelt round Ellerton's practically helpless form, and then did a like service to Quexo. Nor did he forget the prisoner, Blight. But, on sliding back the fo'c'sle hatch, he found the man lying senseless on the floor. Either he had fainted

through sheer fright, or he had been stunned by being thrown against one of the lockers, and bound hand and foot, had been unable to help himself.

Blight was no feather-weight, but in spite of the plunging and rolling of the doomed craft, Mr. McKay gripped him with one hand and dragged his senseless body into the cabin. Then, cutting his bonds, he completed his work of mercy by lashing the sole remaining lifebelt round the body of his would-be murderer.

"You've nothing to put on," gasped Ellerton.

"True; but I have my strength," was the reply, as Mr. McKay stealthily girded on a leather belt in which hung a formidable sheath-knife. It was not the thought of being cast on the waters that troubled him. Death, should it come, would be swift and merciful. But should they survive the dangers of the reef there was the probability of far greater peril.

Though he forbore to mention the fact to Ellerton, Mr. McKay thought of the sharks, and with a fervent unspoken prayer to save them from these creatures, he stood ready for the cabin door to be opened.

Meanwhile Terence and Andy had cut themselves free from their lashings. Twenty yards away the reef showed its teeth as if waiting for its prey.

Then with a noise like the rattle of musketry, which drowned the thunder of the breakers, the staysail burst asunder, and the yawl, in spite of the helmsman's efforts, flew up into the wind.

Down in the trough of a murderous sea she sank. A rapid glance astern showed the glistening reef towering several feet above the little craft, the white foam pouring down the honeycombed ridges as if the rock were baring itself to strike a harder blow.

"The door!" gasped Andy, as a gigantic roller bore down upon the reef.

Terence unfastened the cabin door, and as Mr. McKay appeared, holding Ellerton and Quexo in his powerful grip, the yawl seemed to stand on end. Then, borne on the breast of the roller, the little craft was tossed like a cork right over the rocks, her keel scraping the lee side of the reef by barely a yard !

The next instant the vessel was rolling sluggishly in the sullen swell within the lagoon, with two feet of water in her cabin, yet still afloat and in comparative safety.

" Don't wait to bale out ! " shouted Andy. " You take the helm, pater. Run her up into the wind and we'll anchor."

The ground swell inside the lagoon was too great to allow the yawl to run alongside the usual jetty. They would have to wait till low tide, when the reef would be sufficiently exposed to serve as a breakwater.

Quickly Andy and Terence made their way for'ard to let go the anchor.

When within a couple of hundred yards of the beach the yawl was again put head to wind, and with a splash the anchor plunged to the bottom of the lagoon. But just as Andy was checking the out-rushing cable, a sudden blow from the staysail caught him unawares, and the next instant he was struggling in the sea.

The waves carried the lad clear of the vessel, and in spite of his utmost efforts he was unable to regain the boat. His father hurled a coil of rope, but the line, being wet, became entangled and fell short.

Andy saw that it was impossible to swim back, so with a cheery wave of his arm he pointed towards the surf-beaten shore, and immediately struck out for land.

For an instant Mr. McKay intended to plunge into the sea and accompany his son on his perilous swim, till the thought of the possibility of Blight recovering his senses occurred to him. With Ellerton and Quexo dis-

abled, the margin of safety was not sufficient when only Terence remained to guard the prisoner.

Both lads were surprised to see Mr. McKay rush into the flooded cabin and return with a rifle and a belt of ammunition.

"Don't alarm him," said Andy's father hurriedly. "But there may be sharks about."

Placing the rifle on the fo'c'sle of the heaving vessel, Mr. McKay watched the progress of the swimmer with the greatest concern, at the same time keeping a sharp look-out for the expected appearance of the dreaded dorsal fin of one of the tigers of the deep.

Steadily Andy swam shorewards, keeping up a slow yet powerful side stroke. Now he was in the grip of the ground swell. Once his feet touched bottom, but ere he could obtain a firm footing the "undertow" swept him backwards.

The next instant he was lost to sight in a white-capped roller. The wave broke, then receded, but to the alarm of the anxious watchers there were no signs of the swimmer.

Quickly the wide expanse of sand uncovered; then, just as another breaker was preparing to launch itself upon the beach, Andy sprang to his feet.

Knee-deep in water he rushed up the shelving shore, and managed to grasp a ledge of rock ere he was again overwhelmed by the mighty torrent. Fortunately he was able to retain his grasp, and directly the rock uncovered he ran beyond the reach of the waves and sank exhausted on the beach.

"He'll be all right in a minute," said Mr. McKay with a sigh of relief. "Now, Ellerton, you had better stay here while we get rid of the water; the bunks must be saturated. Come on, Terence, we've been through a great deal, and now, thank God, we are safely home; but all the same, we've plenty of work to do."

Thus exhorted, Terence assisted Mr. McKay to lower and stow the mainsail and secure the fragment of the head sail that had caused so much mischief.

This done, they plied buckets and balers till the level of the water they had shipped sank well beneath the floor-boards of the cabin. The yawl was no longer sluggish, but rose buoyantly as each roller passed under her.

"This is the second gale from this quarter," remarked Mr. McKay, as they were partaking of a hastily cooked meal. "It's taught me a lesson. Had our boat been in her usual dock she would have been dashed to pieces. At the first opportunity we'll lay down a heavy set of moorings and keep her afloat. Here, thanks to the reef, the seas can never be really dangerous, though on shore they break heavily."

"When shall we be able to land, do you think?" asked Terence, for the short, sharp motion of the boat as she pitched at her cable was beginning to prove distressing, both to him and Quexo.

"In a matter of three hours Andy will be able to launch the other tender. We will then lay out another anchor, so as to make doubly sure, and get ashore. Is Andy still on the beach?"

Terence went out of the cabin, and on returning reported that his chum was ascending the cliff path.

"Now we'll secure this fellow Blight once more. I see he's coming round," continued Mr. McKay.

Placing the prisoner again in the fo'c'sle he did not attempt to secure his arms and legs. He merely tied the man's thumbs with a piece of strong but fine cord, so that his arms were kept behind his back. Unless he attempted to struggle, the prisoner would feel but slight inconvenience, while this method was a perfect means of keeping him in a state of utter helplessness.

Shortly after this was done Mr. McKay went on deck

"to have a look round." Gazing landward, he saw Andy standing on the edge of the lower terrace, striving to attract his attention by means of a handkerchief tied to a stick.

"There's Andy calling me up in the Morse code," said Mr. McKay. "I wonder what's up? Terence, will you please hand me over that signalling flag from the for'ard port locker?"

Andy, though not an expert signaller, knew the Morse system fairly well. Slowly he transmitted the startling message:

"*The house has been broken into!*"

CHAPTER XVII

BACK TO THE ISLAND

WITHOUT hesitation Mr. McKay replied :

" Do not go to the house. Remain on beach till you can launch boat."

Andy gave the A.F., showing that he understood the signal, and descending to the shore proceeded to divest himself of most of his sodden clothing.

" There's something amiss ashore, lads," explained Mr. McKay. " Andy's just informed me that the house has been broken into. Of course, it may be another unfortunate party of shipwrecked mariners, or a hurried visit of the crew of a passing ship. All I hope is that there are no natives on the island."

" I wonder if any remained after the canoe left," remarked Ellerton.

" Quite possible. I never thought of that, by Jove ! They might have slipped away in the night in order to steal all they could lay their hands upon. In that case there are only a few. We may be able to hunt them out without much trouble. Still, I'm sorry it's happened."

From the cabin Mr. McKay produced his pair of marine glasses. After a prolonged examination he exclaimed :

" Yes, the door is ajar. I feel certain I closed it when I left."

"We'll soon see what's amiss," said Terence. "See, the reef is uncovering and the wind is dropping."

"Yes, it is," assented Mr. McKay. "Andy will be able to put off in the boat in less than an hour. Ellerton, I think you had better remain on board."

"Why, sir?"

"Because of your arm."

"I'll take care of it. Besides, I can use a revolver with my sound limb if necessary."

"Very well, then; only don't blame me if anything goes wrong. Quexo must stay in any case. There's no need to worry about Blight."

In less than the predicted time Andy succeeded in rowing the small boat safely through the rapidly subsiding swell. Directly he came alongside, Mr. McKay and the two lads slipped on board, and with no greater inconvenience than a thorough drenching—to which they were now perfectly accustomed—the party landed at the natural quay at the foot of the path leading up to the house.

Everything appeared quiet. A hasty glance at the two storehouses on the lower terrace revealed the astonishing discovery that nothing had been disturbed.

"Strange," exclaimed Mr. McKay. "One would have thought that these would be the first places to be ransacked. Now, carefully, lads! Keep your firearms ready."

Cautiously they scaled the cliff path and gained the terrace on which the house stood. Still no signs of human beings, except that the door was half open.

Mr. McKay knocked quietly, then, pushing open the door, he entered. A strange sight met his gaze. Everything movable had been upset or pushed out of place; the floor of the living-room was littered with bedding and the fragments of earthenware vessels.

"The brutes!" ejaculated Mr. McKay savagely. "They've capsized everything out of sheer mischief. I hope I'll be able to lay my hands on them."

The lads, not without feeling of mysterious awe at the scene of wanton desolation, crossed the floor of the room and entered the sleeping quarters.

Here the state of confusion was, if possible, greater than in the outer apartment; but a clue to the mystery was afforded by the discovery of the dead body of a sheep, its head wedged in between the bars of a chair.

"Why," exclaimed Andy, "the sheep have broken out of their pasture!"

"Yes," replied his father. "They managed to find their way into the house, though how I cannot imagine. Something must have frightened them and there was a mad stampede. This poor brute contrived to get his head jammed in the chair, and in his struggles he broke his neck. We've had a rare fright, but, after all, there's nothing of consequence that cannot be set right."

"Hadn't we better get Quexo ashore before it gets dark?"

"Certainly, and Blight as well. I think the best place we can put him is in the small store. He'll be all right for one night, though I'm sorry to keep him bound."

"The treacherous reptile deserves no consideration."

"My dear Andy, we are not Nicaraguan revolutionaries. So long as he remains our prisoner we ought to treat him with the same amount of consideration that any other British criminal receives while awaiting trial. To-morrow we must find a place better suited for his reception."

"There's the farthermost cave, the one beyond those where we've stowed the dynamite," observed Andy. "There's not much in it at present; we can build a partition over the opening and make a door."

"Yes, it will be far more comfortable than his quarters in Ni Atong. We'll make a start to-morrow."

Accordingly Mr. McKay and his son put off in the dinghy—which, by the way, was the larger though more awkwardly-shaped part of the *San Martin's* gig—and transferred Quexo to the shore. The poor fellow was in a bad state, though his wound showed no signs of complications. Ellerton had had his hurts attended to as soon as the house was set in order. Beyond the inflammation caused by the searing-iron, his wound gave no reason for undue anxiety.

"Now then, out you come," ordered Mr. McKay sternly, as Andy and he, armed in case of emergency, returned to the yawl.

Blight obeyed. Indeed, there was no option. His face was a picture of utter cowardice and terror.

"You ain't going to shoot me?" he whined.

"No!" replied Mr. McKay. "I've already told you what I intend to do with you. So long as you behave yourself you'll be treated properly—far better than you deserve."

With that the would-be assassin took his place in the boat, Mr. McKay seated beside him with a revolver in his hand, while Andy rowed.

On arriving at the shore the captive's eyes were bandaged, and, still secured by his thumbs, he was led up to the first terrace and placed in the storehouse. Mr. McKay then severed the cord that bound him, the door was locked, and the rogue left to his own reflections.

The following day was an exceptionally busy one. Ellerton, being unable to do any hard work, was dispatched into the grove to "round up" the sheep, while the three sound members of the establishment, after having conveyed the prisoner his food and water, set off for the cave that was to be prepared for his quarters.

It was situated on the extreme end of the upper terrace, where the level stretch of ground tapered away till it ended in the sheer face of a high precipice.

Outside the mouth of the cave was a belt of grass land about ten yards in width, the cliff falling to a depth of about seventy feet, while above the cave the rocks, too smooth to afford a foothold, towered to nearly a hundred feet.

The cave was quite fifty feet in depth, and averaged ten feet in width, while its height in places was over twenty feet. Its entrance, however, was barely four feet wide and six in height.

"There won't be much light for the poor beggar when once we've inclosed the entrance," remarked Andy.

"That is so," replied his father. "I really don't see why we couldn't inclose a strip of land between the two cliffs, and let him have the run of it."

"How inclose it?"

"I think we can spare enough of the galvanised iron sheeting to make an unclimbable fence. Each sheet is ten feet in height, is it not?"

"Certainly not less."

"Then we'll make a start. Although we cannot possibly hope to complete the work to-day, we may reasonably expect to finish it to-morrow afternoon."

The soil proved to be fairly soft, so that it was necessary to sink the base of the iron sheets at least two feet into the ground. Strong timber uprights with cross-braces of railway iron served to make the fence secure, a doorway being left to afford means of communication with the prisoner's quarters.

"I think we have taken every possible precaution," remarked Mr. McKay, after the fence was completed and the bedding and the other necessary articles for the ex-pearler's use had been placed in the cave. "Of course,

this business entails a considerable amount of extra work, for besides the feeding arrangements we must make a thorough examination of the fence every day."

"Why? He cannot possibly pull it down, and I'm sure he will not be able to scale the wall."

"There are at least two ways he might manage to escape. He could either burrow under the fence, or he might manage to spring from the top of a pile of furniture on to the upper edge of the wall. If we make a point of examining both sides of the fence twice a day, we shall be able to detect any sign of a tunnel; while it is unlikely that an effort to scale the wall will meet with any success, for the edge of the iron sheets is sharp enough to cut through his hands should he make a leap at it. I'll talk to him pretty straight and let him know what to expect if he does manage to escape, though, at the same time, it will be an anxious business for us while he's at large—if he's fool enough to try it."

That evening Blight was conducted to his new quarters, duly cautioned as to his behaviour, and safely locked up; and from that day the "prison yard," as Terence termed it, was carefully examined night and morning.

It was, as Mr. McKay predicted, a severe strain on their time, for to guard against a surprise it was necessary that two people, armed in case of emergency, should make a visit to the prisoner twice daily.

At the first opportunity a strong set of moorings was laid down off the little stone quay, sufficiently clear of the shore to be out of the range of breaking rollers. Here the yawl was to make her future berth, the dinghy being kept on the beach well beyond the reach of the tide.

It was proposed to make a trip at an early date to the Marquesas, there to hand over the criminal into the charge of the British Consular Agent.

The planning of this voyage necessitated much thought, for Mr. McKay was loath to abandon the island entirely. On the one hand he did not like to let Andy and Ellerton make the voyage with the prisoner ; on the other, he did not like to leave Terence and Quexo, and, perhaps, Andy, alone on the island.

" I have been wondering," he remarked, " whether my brother and your five cousins would care to join us. There are boundless possibilities in the place, and I don't think they would mind a change. Once we have a few more members of the little colony, we can spare a few months to visit our respective homes. Ellerton, I know, would be pleased to see England again. And you, Terence, would you not like to return to ' Our Lady of the Snows ' ? "

" Rather ! " replied Ellerton. " I should be awfully glad to see my people again ; but, I must admit, I haven't had enough of McKay's Island. I should like to spend a great deal of my life here."

" And I, too," added Terence.

" Gently, lads, gently ! " replied Mr. McKay. " You must remember that, although the island can be made self-supporting—for there's tons of copra to be had, and I have no doubt that the bed of the lagoon is covered with pearl oysters—the idea of living here is not altogether favourable. It wouldn't be good for us to have only each other's company for long. I'll not deny that this open-air, free-and-easy life is splendid from a physical point of view, but isolation tends to destroy one's mental powers."

" Then you advise me to get away from the island as soon as I can, and never return to it ? "

" Not at all. You misunderstood me, Ellerton. The island is as much yours as it is mine, or Terence's. What I meant to imply was that once we can open up com-

munication with the regular ports of call, so that we can leave whenever we wish to, the better it will be for all of us. But once abandon the island it becomes the property of the next comer. To put the matter briefly, I intend to sit tight here; but should any of you go away for, say, even three or four years, you will be welcome to return and secure your part of the commonwealth — such as it is."

Finally it was decided that Blight should be kept on the island for the present, and that Ellerton and Andy should attempt to navigate the yawl to the Society Islands, communicate with their friends at home, and also write to the Agent at Fiji requesting that a British gunboat be dispatched to ratify the annexation of McKay's Island.

They could then return and await events.

A week or more passed. Preparations for the voyage were pushed forward, and at length everything was ready for the lads' adventurous expedition.

"Now, lads, turn in early, for you may not get a good night's rest for some days," observed Mr. McKay, on the evening prior to the day fixed for their departure.

The advice was acted upon, but Ellerton could not sleep. The night was sultry, not a breath of wind rustled the leaves of the palm-trees. Mosquitoes buzzed in and out of the room, while without the glow of the fire-flies betokened a spell of fine weather.

Uneasily the lad tossed from side to side on his bed. A stray mosquito managed to pass the meshes of the mosquito-net, and settled down to business, his object of attack being the lad's nose.

Ellerton knew that rest could only be obtained by killing the insect, so sitting up be began his plan of campaign.

Suddenly his ear caught the sound of the long-drawn

shriek of a concertina, followed by a chorus of shouts and exclamations of surprise.

In an instant he was out of bed.

"Wake up! Wake up!" he shouted, shaking the heavy sleepers with unsparing hand. "The savages are upon us!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A SURPRISE FOR THE INVADERS

HASTILY throwing on portions of their clothing and seizing their rifles and revolvers, which, by a general custom, were invariably kept loaded, the four white men prepared to dash out of the house.

"Don't show a light on any account," cautioned Mr. McKay. "We must let the storehouses go and hold this terrace."

It was a complete surprise. The natives, who had wrested Ahii from its former owners, had followed up their success in driving off the invaders by paying a return visit to Ni Atong. The population of that island had either been killed or reserved for a more lingering death, and from one of the latter their captors learnt of the existence of McKay's Island and its wealth of metal goods so prized by the South Sea Islanders.

Accordingly ten large canoes set out on an expedition to raid the white men's dwelling.

Arriving within sight of the peak of the island, they kept in the offing till night, then with torches blazing aloft they found the passage into the lagoon, and, paddling rapidly, landed on the beach below the settlement.

Thereupon three hundred powerful savages, armed with club, bow, spear, and knife, and bearing torches, began the ascent of the path that led to the three terraces.

The lower storehouse was their first discovery. Quickly finding that no white men were within, the host of warriors resumed their advance. Some, however, tempted by the various articles stored in the building, began to help themselves.

Then it was that a savage laid hold of the concertina that Ellerton had brought from the wreck and had hitherto been left neglected in the store. The native was examining his prize in the torchlight, when, happening to come into collision with another plunderer, the concertina gave out a startling screech as if to atone for its days of idleness.

Dropping the musical instrument of torture like a live coal, the savage rushed from the building, his yells of terror being taken up by his companions. This diversion was the cause of alarming Ellerton, and consequently saving the inhabitants of McKay's Island from a massacre.

"Aim low, lads!" shouted Mr. McKay. "Let 'em have it!"

The conflict was short and sharp. Although many of the attackers got within throwing distance, not a single native succeeded in gaining the top of the steep and narrow path.

They fled hurriedly to the shore, where they rallied to await the dawn.

"Anyone hurt?" inquired Mr. McKay.

There was a general reply in the negative, though in the heat of the firing there had been several narrow escapes, for the ground was bristling with spears and littered with stones, which, had they struck anyone, would have caused serious if not fatal wounds.

In the excitement Ellerton had forgotten his crippled arm, and had used a rifle equally as well as his comrades; but the exertion had caused the blood to flow afresh.

"Rotten luck, I call it," he grumbled as Andy re-

adjusted the bandage. "You must load at least a dozen revolvers for me. Thank goodness it's my left arm."

"It's a fair surprise," remarked Mr. McKay. "We've our work cut out to drive them off. Won't they play old Harry with the storehouse—and the yawl."

"Oh!" exclaimed Andy in dismay, at the thought of his particular treasure being in the hands of the savages. "Whatever can be done to save it?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid," replied his father. "Perhaps if the mischief is not already done and the vessel holed, we can keep them off with a long range fire, though I can hold out no strong hopes in that direction. The plain truth is, that we are in a tight corner, and we must make the best of it."

For some minutes the defenders kept silence, listening to the subdued sounds of their foes.

"Look here," said Mr. McKay, "it's no use sitting here and doing nothing. Terence, will you go back to the house and bring three or four spades? We'll dig a shelter trench along the edge of the cliff so as to be able to command the path without unduly exposing ourselves to the rascals. Andy, you had better go with him and bring some more rifles and some ammunition."

Upon the lads' return, the little band set to work to throw up their defences, and barely had the work been completed ere the day broke.

"There are not so many of them after all," remarked Andy, when the full strength of the attacking party was revealed. "We had greater odds at Ahii."

"And a worse position," added his father. "We can hold out here, I fancy, but we cannot prevent the damage to our stores and gear. See, they've begun again."

Numbers of the savages were engaged in looting the store, while others, to Andy's great disgust especially, had paddled off to where the yawl lay at her moorings.

"Now," exclaimed Andy, setting the backsight of his rifle. "Eight hundred yards!"

"That's about the range," assented his father, and four rifles opened fire upon the daring natives, Ellerton contriving to rest the barrel of his weapon upon the ridge of the earthwork, so as to avoid using his damaged arm.

The bullets all fell close to the yawl, several of the natives being hit; but possibly in their hour of triumph the savages scorned the white men's weapons. Casting off the moorings, they leisurely towed the yawl out towards the reef and plundered her.

Great was the defenders' rage to see the blacks hacking at the rigging, sails, and cordage, throwing the contents of the cabin-lockers into the bottom of their canoe, and wrenching the metal cleats, hinges, and shroud-plates from her hull. This done, a powerful savage stove a hole in the craft, and slowly sinking by the stern, she at length plunged to the bottom of the lagoon.

"It's hard lines, Andy," exclaimed his father as he paused to recharge his magazine. "But I'm afraid we shall have to make greater sacrifices before this affair is over."

"We seem to have horrible bad luck," replied Andy savagely. "First at Ahii, and now here."

"Remember we were saved by the merciful intervention of One above," added Mr. McKay. "And if it please Him, we'll come out of this in safety. We've had a lot to be thankful for."

"I know, but all the same it's hard lines. Take that, you brute!" Andy added, pressing the trigger.

It was a splendid shot. A group of natives had begun to batter the yawl's tender to splinters. They were a good four hundred yards away, but Andy's shot struck a tall savage, clad in a gorgeous cloak of white and red feathers, fairly between the shoulder-blades.

Andy had laid aside his rifle immediately after discharging it, and had snatched up a pair of field-glasses. The effect of the chief's death—for a chief he evidently was—caused the wreckers to abandon their task, and they fled to join their fellows under the shelter of the lowermost cliff.

"They are preparing for another rush," observed Terence.

"Yes. I wish we had a Maxim or two," replied Andy. "That would stop them."

"I have an idea," exclaimed Ellerton. "I can best be spared, so I'll run over to the caves and bring back a few sticks of dynamite and some detonators."

"Good! Good!" replied Mr. McKay. "You're a wonder, Hoppy. Mind how you come back, and don't stumble, or we won't be able to find even your fragments."

Ellerton set off on his self-imposed mission, and presently returned with about fourteen pounds of dynamite and half a dozen time-fuses.

"What do you propose to do?" asked Terence. "Make a bomb and roll it over the cliff?"

"No!" replied the youth. "We can load up one of those trucks, set the time-fuse, and turn the thing adrift."

"It will mean good-bye to our storehouse," observed Mr. McKay. "But that cannot be helped, so let's to work; they'll be rushing us in a few minutes."

At the top of the cable-railway stood three empty trucks. In ordinary circumstances these would be filled with water, and their increased weight would cause them to descend and, at the same time, bring up the loaded trucks from the shore or the storehouse. Half-way down the line, and almost abreast of the building, were three other trucks, waiting to be loaded should occasion require.

Around these trucks, which were invisible from the upper terrace, were most of the savages, who were massing fo the attack at the base of the second terrace.

"You are quite sure you can unshackle the thing easily?" asked Mr. McKay. "If there's a hitch we shall be the ones to be blown to smithereens."

"I'll make sure of it," replied Ellerton, and securing the lowermost of the three trucks to the second one by means of a piece of rope, he unfastened the proper connecting shackles.

Then placing the explosive in the truck he asked Mr. McKay to take the time.

"It's set for four minutes," he announced. "Half-a-minute will be quite enough, so at three and a half minutes from the time the fuse is lit I'll cut the rope and off she'll go."

"Stand back, you fellows! If it goes wrong we need not all be blown sky-high. Are you ready? Stand by!"

The fuse began to hiss and splutter. Ellerton, knife in hand, kept his eyes fixed on Mr. McKay, who, standing fifty yards off, held his watch before him.

"Precious long three and a half minutes," thought the lad.

It was not a pleasant task standing within two yards of a highly-charged explosive. More than once he felt tempted to cut the rope and let the truck go.

"Time?" he shouted huskily, for his heart seemed literally in his throat.

"No, not yet," replied Mr. McKay.

Realising the strain on the plucky youth, he began to walk slowly in the direction of the truck.

"Stand back, sir!"

Mr. McKay stopped and slowly raised his hand.

"Stand by! Let go!"

One swift sweep of the sharp blade and the cord was

severed. Slowly the truck began to gather way, then moving with increased speed it plunged on its headlong course.

Ten seconds later—before the fuse had time to complete its work—the descending truck crashed into the stationary ones. There was a deafening roar, a cloud of dust, in which was mingled a number of heavy, shapeless objects, and then an ominous silence, broken only by the crash of some fragments of wood and metal hurled high in the air by the explosive.

Rushing to the edge of the cliff the four defenders gazed upon the result of their stratagem.

Where the trucks had stood gaped a pit six feet in depth, for one of the peculiarities of dynamite is that it shows its power mainly where it meets resistance. Of the storehouse scarce a vestige remained, while the double line of rails had been uprooted for a distance of nearly twenty yards.

The havoc wrought amongst the savages was appalling. So many were killed that had the white men so wished it they could have fallen upon the survivors and exterminated them ; but such was not their intention.

"We must act with prudence or we shall be left with fifty wounded savages on our hands," said Mr. McKay. "Those who are unhurt will take to their canoes, and leave the others to their fate, and that won't do ! "

"How can we stop them taking to their canoes ? " asked Andy.

"By taking advantage of their cowed condition and disarming them. Come, let's to work."

Fearlessly the four defenders descended the path to the lower terrace.

"We'll begin with those fellows first ! " exclaimed Mr. McKay, pointing to a group of natives cowering, with

their hands over their eyes, against a spur of the cliff. "Stand by with your revolvers in case they resist."

There was no resistance. Passively the savages allowed Mr. McKay to remove their weapons, which had fallen from their nerveless grasp.

Seizing one man firmly but gently, Mr. McKay dragged him from his companions. The native's face bore a strong resemblance to that of a sheep led to the slaughtering-block; no doubt he thought he was to be slain.

Escorted by the three lads the prisoner was taken to the fringe of the cocoa-nut grove, where Mr. McKay presented him with a branch of a palm—the almost universal emblem of peace.

At this the native began to see a chance of having his life spared, and Mr. McKay, pointing to the canoes and then to the wounded savages, made signs to the man that they desired their crippled enemies to be placed in the native craft.

This experiment was tried upon some of the other unharmed savages, with equally good results, and quickly recovering their senses the natives set to work with a will.

One powerful-looking savage, however, refused to deliver up his club, but instead made a sudden rush at Mr. McKay with the evident intention of knocking him over the head.

Mr. McKay had discarded his rifle, and his revolver was in the side pocket of his pyjama coat. Coolly his hand sought his pocket, and without attempting to withdraw the weapon he discharged it at his assailant, who was barely five yards off.

The heavy bullet, striking the man full in the chest, laid him dead on the ground, while the other savages, awestruck at the sight of one of their number being killed by no visible agency, were again thrown into a state of panic.

At length all the wounded were distributed between five of the canoes. Then Mr. McKay made signs for the rest of the natives to embark, keeping the other five canoes on the beach, and within an hour of the explosion the sorry remnant of the invaders was paddling back towards the island of Ahii.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PRISONER'S ESCAPE

"Do you think they will ever return?" asked Terence.

"I think they have had enough," replied Mr. McKay. "They've had a lesson."

"And so have we," added Ellerton, dolefully regarding the fragments of the storehouse and the shattered line of rails.

"And our boat; how shall we be able to leave the island now?" asked Andy.

"Perhaps the damage done to that is not so great as we imagine. With the help of these canoes we may be able to raise her. But we'll go into that question later. At present I feel as if I could enjoy a good square meal."

So back to the dwelling-house they went, where Quexo, who had been quaking all the time, was reassured.

"Don't you think we could rig up an electric alarm?" said Terence during the progress of the meal. "There's plenty of insulated copper wire in the small store."

"It would be as well," replied Mr. McKay. "We might have a return visit; though, as I said before, I don't anticipate one."

"But some natives from another island might try and surprise us," said Andy. "News travels quickly, and perhaps we might again be favoured with the unwelcome attentions of these savage gentry."

"And I tell you what," continued Terence, waxing en-

thusiastic, for electrical engineering was his strong point, "we brought one of the *San Martin's* searchlights ashore. I'll try and fix it up and connect it with the dynamo."

"We'll see what's to be done. But now, how about Blight? It's time we paid him a visit."

"I guess he's been wondering what the dust-up was about," remarked Andy, as he prepared the prisoner's daily ration.

Andy and Terence were deputed to visit the prisoner, and, armed as usual and carrying a supply of food and water, they set off for the fenced-in dwelling.

From the elevation of the upper terrace they could see the distant dark brown sails of the canoes, for the wind was light and their progress had been slow.

"They'll have a nice yarn to pitch into their friends when they return," observed Terence.

"They stood a good chance of pitching into us," replied Andy grimly. "The rascals!"

For his mind was still sore on the subject of the scuttled yawl.

On arriving at the fence Andy put down his load, and producing a key unlocked the door. The space without the cave was deserted.

"Strange," muttered Andy. "Blight is generally anxious for his food."

Carefully relocking the door, the lads made their way to the mouth of the cave. Here, too, silence reigned.

"Blight! Where are you?"

There was no answer. Andy repeated the call, but without result.

"Is he asleep, or is he dead?" asked Terence, and gripping their pistols the two lads entered the cave.

Contrasted with the brilliant sunshine without, the apartment seemed plunged into utter darkness, but by degrees the lads' eyes grew accustomed to the gloom.

"Be careful," whispered Andy. "Perhaps he's up to some of his tricks."

"You locked the door in the fence?"

"Yes."

"Then let us explore the cave thoroughly."

This they did, penetrating into the cavern and examining every recess as they advanced, till the daylight which filtered in was insufficient to allow them to continue their search.

"Where's his lamp? I know the pater let him have one."

"I saw it on a ledge close to the entrance. Have you any matches?"

Andy had; matches were becoming scarce on McKay's Island, and whenever possible a burning glass was used for obtaining fire. Being, in this case, without his magnifying glass, Andy had to use one of the precious hoard of matches that he kept in a watertight gun-metal case, and lighting the lamp the two explorers resumed their search.

"He's gone right enough," exclaimed Terence, as they "drew blank."

"But where? And how?"

"Goodness only knows. Let's run back and tell the others."

Mr. McKay was greatly upset at the news, and seizing a light rifle he strode off towards the prisoner's quarters, accompanied by the three lads.

"Did you leave the door open?" he inquired, as they came in sight of the fence.

"Yes," replied Andy. "I was in a hurry to tell you, and what does it matter now that the man has escaped?"

"For all we know he might have been lying concealed within the fence the whole time you were looking for him,

and finding the door unlocked after you left he coolly walked out. Andy, I'm surprised at such carelessness."

It was seldom that Mr. McKay was annoyed with his son, but the apparent laxity was enough to justify his displeasure.

With Blight roaming about the island, the existence of the others would be a continual round of anxiety. The man was no ordinary criminal. He was versed in all the wiles of the savage life, possessed of considerable strength, skill, and reliance, and was not above resorting to treachery and murder to gain his ends.

A careful examination of the outside of the fence revealed no signs of a burrow under the iron sheeting, but close to the part of the wall that touched the cliff there were unmistakable signs of a man's feet.

"There you are! He did not escape by the door after all, Andy," remarked his father. "See, these two footprints close together show us that he jumped, and, what is more, jumped skilfully, for there are no traces of his heels. We'll find out how he scaled the fence by examining the other side."

Entering the door, the gaolers found that Blight had cut a number of niches in the rock and had thus managed to climb to the top of the fence. The cutting of these footholds must have taken a considerable time, and in spite of the daily examination of the ground for any sign of a tunnel, the niches had escaped observation.

"You see how he hoodwinked us," said Mr. McKay, pointing to the little heap of dried grass and mud. "He dug out those footholds and filled them up with grass and clay, so that they presented the same appearance as the rest of the cliff. Now, lads, we must find him, and the sooner the better."

Accordingly they returned to the house, where Terence was told off to remain on guard with Quexo in the event

of the escaped prisoner breaking in and securing arms. The mulatto, though far from having recovered from his injuries, was strong enough to use a pistol, so the two could hold the dwelling-house against a surprise.

Having supplied themselves with enough provisions for the day, the two McKays and Ellerton set out on the trail of the fugitive. Mr. McKay and his son took rifles and revolvers and also an axe to " blaze " the palm-trees, while Ellerton, by reason of his damaged arm, carried a revolver only in addition to his canvas knapsack containing his share of provisions.

Tracking was a new experience to the English lad, and he could not help wondering at the keenness displayed by father and son as they followed the scantiest trail.

Andy would walk with considerable speed for a hundred yards, his eyes fixed upon the ground; while Mr. McKay would follow at his heels, at the same time keeping a sharp look-out on all sides in order to guard against a sudden attack.

Then the order would be reversed, Mr. McKay following the trail, and his son acting as a cover to his father.

For nearly a mile the track was fairly well-defined, though Ellerton had to confess that he would have failed to notice it.

The fugitive had skirted the base of the cliff, then plunging into the palm grove, he had gone by a roundabout way towards the left; and was evidently heading for the thickly-wooded belt of land surrounding the base of the highest peak of the island.

Then the pursuers met with an unexpected rebuff. The trail led up to a broad tract of barren country, the surface of the land consisting of rocky mounds covered with a deposit of lava—the result of volcanic action many years previously.

" This kind of stuff extends right up to the base of the

peak," said Andy. "We had a rough scramble when Quexo and I climbed the mountain. I know what it's like. There are hundreds of rifts where a man might hide himself."

"He's covered his tracks," announced Mr. McKay. "See, he's gone in that direction, then back again and off in entirely the opposite way."

"And the trail is getting very much fainter," added Andy.

"It's my belief that he's lying low within a few yards of us," continued his father. "It's an admirable hiding-place, but it's certain that he must have food, so he's bound to make for the cocoanuts and bread-fruit trees sooner or later. That's why he's doubled on his tracks."

"We must double on our tracks before long," replied Andy. "That is, if we don't want to spend a night in this wilderness."

"That's what I intend to do," said his father in a low voice. "I want you two to go back to the house. Make plenty of noise, and grumble at having been unsuccessful. I'm going to remain here."

"Alone ?" queried Andy.

"Hist ! Don't speak so loud. Yes, alone. You don't imagine I'm afraid to tackle an unarmed man, do you ? Now, listen to what I have to say. It will be dark in an hour or so, but the moon will rise at nine o'clock. Make your way here at sunrise to-morrow, and I'll warrant you'll find me safe enough—and not alone, I hope."

Andy knew that it was no good arguing, and the two lads set off towards their home. The blazed track was followed without difficulty, and just as the sun set they emerged from the forest and gained the terrace on which the house stood.

"Where's Mr. McKay ?" asked Terence.

"Left behind."

"Left behind? What for? Has anything gone wrong?"

"I hope not. He insisted, so there was no help for it. We've to rejoin him at sunrise to-morrow," replied Andy.

All that night the lads did not attempt to sleep. Filled with anxiety, they listened intently for the sound of a rifle shot. The air was perfectly still, and though the strained nerves of the watchers caused them to hear a variety of imaginary sounds, no reassuring report of firearms broke the echoes of the palm-groves.

"Look here," exclaimed Ellerton, after hours of weary vigil, "the moon's up quite enough to allow us to find our way; so let's make a start."

Andy shook his head.

"You ought to know the pater well enough by this time, Hoppy. It's rotten hanging about here, I admit, but it's part of the game. So let's make the best of it."

CHAPTER XX

THE ENEMY IS CORNERED

Mr. McKay, left to himself, prepared for his all-night watch. His hiding-place consisted of a crevice which commanded a view of the route his companions had taken. Standing upright he could also see over the rock in which he was concealed, though prudence urged him not to show his head above the gaunt stone walls of his lair.

He rested himself on a convenient ledge, and waited, with his rifle across his knee. Then, as the sun set and intense darkness brooded over the land, he braced himself for his task. Instinct told him that the fugitive would skulk in the rocks till the moon rose; then in all probability he would prowl for food.

More than once Mr. McKay fancied he heard the crunching of a boot upon the pumice stone. Twice he grasped his rifle, as a dark shadow seemed to loom up against the darkness.

"Imagination," he remarked to himself. "What is the matter with my nerves?" But a finger pressed upon his wrist showed him that his pulse was beating regularly.

Then came a sound that could not possibly be mistaken—a smothered sneeze.

Blight was within a few yards of Mr. McKay, but in which direction the latter was unable to decide.

Then came the scuffling of feet. The fugitive was

scuffling blindly across the rock. At any instant he might pitch into the crevice right into the arms of his pursuer.

Nearer and nearer he came, cursing under his breath as his feet came in contact with the ruts and sharp corners of the rocks. Mr. McKay could even hear the laboured breathing of his quarry.

Realising the danger of making his way over the pit-falls, Blight sat down, muttering angrily at being baulked, at the same time abusing the moon for its tardy appearance.

Mr. McKay waited, rifle in hand, feeling almost pleased. He pictured the fugitive's consternation when the moonlight revealed his tracker covering him at ten paces. It was the old animal instinct, the joy of the chase, whether hunter and hunted be human beings or mere beasts of the field.

Above the tops of the distant palm-trees a pale yellow light dawned in the eastern sky. Stronger and stronger it grew, till the golden disc of the queen of night appeared, the brilliant light throwing the rocks into strong relief.

The escaped prisoner, now that his path seemed clear, prepared to make his journey towards the trees once more, and obviously fearing no danger, he scrambled over a flat-topped boulder. Barely had he stood erect when Mr. McKay, rifle to shoulder, shouted :

" The game's up once more. Throw up your hands ! "

So great was Blight's surprise that he stood stock still, with mouth agape, staring at the silhouetted form of his enemy ; then, recovering himself, rushed wildly towards Mr. McKay, shrieking :

" You'll never take me alive, bad luck to you ! "

It was the act of a madman. Ere he could cover the intervening space, Mr. McKay could have shot him dead on the spot. But the Australian was loath to be the rascal's

executioner; the business seemed to him to be mere butchery.

Turning down the muzzle of his rifle, the solitary tracker aimed the weapon at his enemy's feet. This action had a most restraining effect upon the rogue. He would welcome a swift and almost painless death, but to be deliberately crippled, secured at leisure, and dragged back to his prison, did not appeal to him. He turned swiftly and, dodging from side to side as he ran, he sped rapidly across the rocks

Mr. McKay fired, but the shot went wide. He could have perforated the man's body between the shoulders with the greatest ease, but a pot-shot in the moonlight at a pair of swiftly-moving legs afforded plenty of opportunities of missing.

The fugitive uttered a yell of defiance, and sped onwards. Another fifty yards and he would be lost to sight in the midst of a labyrinth of fantastically-shaped rocks.

Mr. McKay did not attempt to fire a second shot. The success of his long vigil depended upon keeping the chase in view. Laying his rifle on the ground and making sure that the flap of his pistol-holster was loose, he vaulted upon the rock and set off in pursuit.

Although "hard as nails" and sound of wind, Mr. McKay forgot for the time being that the result of his accident on board the *San Martin* had left him somewhat weak in his lower limbs.

With elbows pressed close to his sides he ran, but ere forty yards were covered he found himself lurching dangerously. Setting his jaw firmly, he persevered, keeping his eyes fixed upon the form of the furgitive, yet he was forced to confess that he was losing ground.

Blight was now within twenty yards of the sheltering rocks. Dare the pursuer use his revolver and stop this

headlong flight? The odds were too great, for with the exertion of running his aim would be erratic. No, he must continue to run and trust to chance that his quarry might be cornered somewhere.

Suddenly Blight stumbled, kicking up a cloud of pumice dust that looked silvery in the moonlight. Two yards he traversed ere he fell headlong in the soft lava, and before he could stagger to his feet his pursuer was almost within arm's length.

"Give in, you idiot," shouted Mr. McKay, drawing his revolver.

For answer Blight laughed, and, bending low as he ran, he doubled away to the right, where the ground sloped downwards towards a line of irregularly-shaped cliffs. He was crippled. He had twisted his ankle, and everything was in Mr. McKay's favour.

Unwilling to close with the desperate fugitive, Mr. McKay prepared to maim him with a bullet through his leg; but even as he levelled the weapon, Blight disappeared from sight with a shriek of terror.

Instinctively Mr. McKay threw himself flat on his back, digging his heels into the soft yielding dust; but surely and gradually he found himself slipping towards the mouth of a gaping abyss. The very ground on which he was sprawling was moving. He could hear the rustle of the sand and small stones as they dropped over the ledge into the apparently fathomless chasm.

Desperately Mr. McKay plunged his arms into the sliding sand; but his efforts were unavailing. He was being launched towards the yawning gulf, the horrors of which seemed worse in the moonlight.

Just as he was on the point of slipping over the edge—his heels were already over the abyss—his hand, buried arm's length in the pumice, came in contact with a piece of hard rock.

Would it hold ? he wondered.

Slowly his outstretched arm began to change from a vertical to an almost horizontal position as his body still continued its downward motion. The rock afforded but a slender hold: either the fabric might become loosened, or his hand might be unable to keep up the strain, and then—— ?

Mr. McKay ceased to struggle. He could feel the sand slipping from under him, streaming past like a solid cataract. So long as he kept quiet he was comparatively safe, but directly he commenced to find a foothold, his peril increased threefold. Yet he knew that every moment his grip upon the small pinnacle that stood between him and instant death was gradually becoming weaker.

In those awful moments of peril he could hear the laboured breathing of his enemy, coming apparently from a great depth beneath his feet. Blight, then, was still alive, but his gasping breaths sounded ominous.

At length, regaining his self-possession, Mr. McKay put forth a final effort in an endeavour to draw his feet clear of the awful chasm.

Inch by inch he worked himself upwards, against the increasing torrent of sand, when suddenly the rocky ledge was wrenched from its base, and the next instant he was swept into the gulf.

Amidst a shower of dust and stones he felt himself hurtling through the pitch dark air, then everything became a blank.

. . . . . .

The first rays of the rising sun filtering through the narrow neck of the inverted funnel-shaped chasm strove to disperse the darkness.

Stretched upon the thick carpet of powdered pumice

were two motionless figures, partially covered with the flow of dust that trickled from the open air like the sand of a gigantic hour-glass.

The head and shoulders of one of the victims were pillowed upon the body of the other, who lay, with arms outstretched, gazing upwards with sightless eyes at the narrow slit of sky that was visible between the lips of the abyss.

Blight had gone to his last account.

Slowly opening his eyes, Mr. McKay blinked stupidly at nothingness for a few seconds, then stretched out his arms. It was the action of a man awakening from slumber. He felt no pain ; he had no idea of where he was, or of what had occurred.

With the intention of going to sleep again he turned his head on its ghastly pillow, but on drawing up his arms to compose himself, his head came in contact with the cold face of his companion in misfortune.

The touch acted like an electric shock. In an instant the details of the tragedy flashed across his mind. He stumbled to his feet, but overcome by weakness, he sank once more upon the dust-covered floor.

How long had he been in this hideous deathtrap ? he wondered. Was it a night, or many days and nights ? Had his comrades searched in vain and had they abandoned their quest and left him to his fate ?

For quite half-an-hour Mr. McKay sat and thought, striving to collect his mental and physical powers. He went over the events leading up to the final tragedy—the ambush, the pursuit, Blight's disappearance, and his own terrible ordeal on the sliding sand. Then he reflected that his trail would be fairly well-defined, and that help must be forthcoming. His watch was still going, so that he knew that it was only the morning following his night's vigil.

Overhead a dazzling ray of sunlight shone obliquely through the opening, illuminating the shaft-like sides of his prison, but so dead black was the colour of the rock that hardly any light was reflected to the bottom of the pit. He could, in fact, just see his own hands and the grey features of his ill-fated companion.

Mr. McKay groped about the floor. At first his fingers encountered nothing but dust. He plunged his arm up to the elbow in the soft yielding deposit; but nothing solid met his touch.

Fearing that he might be lying on a ledge overhanging a pit of fathomless depth, Mr. McKay extended his field of exploration, making wide sweeps with his arms. Presently his fingers encountered a metal object. It was his revolver.

"At least," he thought, "I can signal for aid."

But on second thoughts he hesitated. Then he remembered his box of matches. Fumbling in his pocket he found the little case, and eagerly, like a miser counting his gold, he passed the little sticks one by one through his fingers. Ten—ten priceless matches.

He struck one. For the moment his eyes were dazzled by the yellow fire, but ere it burnt out he made sure of two things. He was not lying on the edge of another precipice; that was reassuring. His second discovery was disconcerting. His trusty revolver was choked with fine dust, and had he discharged it he would have assuredly been injured by the bursting of the barrel.

The match flickered out, and to the imprisoned man the darkness seemed denser than ever. It pressed upon him like a real substance, till he felt tempted to shout in his distress.

By degrees he grew calmer, and staggering to his feet he moved his limbs with extreme caution. To his

satisfaction they were still sound, though he was beginning to feel stiff and bruised from head to foot.

The light of a second match showed that Blight was indeed beyond all human aid, so, placing his handkerchief over the face of the corpse, Mr. McKay retired a few steps till a third match became necessary.

He found himself within a few feet of one of the walls of his prison. The stone, divided by volcanic agency, was almost vertical at the point, though at others it receded so that the base of the abyss was several yards beyond the perpendicular height of the shaft. Close to him was a deep crack in the wall, known by mountaineers as a "chimney."

It might be possible to scale the rock, he thought, but the knowledge that the edge of the shaft was "rotten" compelled Mr. McKay to abandon that attempt. He must wait; yet, unwilling to remain idle, he resolved to sacrifice four more of his precious matches in exploring the immediate vicinity of the chasm.

Keeping close to the wall, Mr. McKay proceeded with the utmost caution, till he reached a yawning cavern that descended abruptly.

For a moment he hesitated, fearing the presence of carbonic acid gas, but on holding the lighted match close to the ground the flame burnt clear and bright.

To his surprise Mr. McKay found his hand resting on the butt of a musket. The weapon was lying on the hard, rocky floor of the cave, for here no dust had penetrated. Another match revealed the fact that the firearm was of an ancient pattern, the combined flint and matchlock being of not later date than the end of the seventeenth century.

"By George! This is a find!" exclaimed Mr. McKay.

For the time being he forgot his surroundings, interest being centred in this relic of bygone days.

Then, unwilling to risk using his remaining stock of matches, yet mentally resolving to explore this part of the cavern at the earliest favourable opportunity, he retraced his steps to that part of the chasm that lay beneath the narrow shaft. Here he sat down and waited, hoping for the speedy arrival of Andy and Ellerton.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BUCCANEERS' CAVE

It could not have been more than a couple of hours after Mr. McKay returned to consciousness that the two lads emerged from the forest and gazed wonderingly upon the rock-strewn plain. Not knowing the course of events, they had left Terence and Quexo to guard the dwelling-house against a possible attack.

"Steady, Hoppy!" cautioned Andy, as Ellerton was about to rush towards the spot where they had left Mr. McKay on the previous evening. "I don't like the look of things. Suppose that rogue has got the upper hand? You would be potted to a cert if you rushed into the open in that reckless style. You work round to the right and I'll go by the left."

Accordingly the lads, taking advantage of every bit of cover, advanced with the utmost caution towards the little rift in the dark rock where Mr. McKay had made his ambush.

There was his rifle, lying on the ground, with no sign of an empty cartridge to show that the weapon had been discharged. Andy removed the magazine and found that the cartridges were still intact.

"I can't understand it," he exclaimed. "The pater was evidently in a hurry, for, you see, the rifle was not placed against a rock, but was thrown down on the ground. He's too careful, in ordinary circumstances, to do a thing like that."

"Well, where is he? If Blight had managed to get the better of him he would have taken away the rifle."

"He may have chased him right across this island. Come on, it's no use wasting time here; let's try and pick up the trail."

Andy leapt upon the flat top of the rock and assisted his chum to follow his example. Both took it for granted that there was no further need for concealment.

From where they stood the ground had the appearance of a broad belt of flat rock, divided in all directions by narrow crevices, most of which could be jumped across with the greatest ease, while ahead was the first of a series of cliffs, which incircled the base of the peak of the island.

"Look!" exclaimed Ellerton, pointing to a little heap of brown canvas which was lying on the rock about thirty feet away. "There's your father's haversack."

The lad was right, for Mr. McKay had discarded the article as he commenced the pursuit of the fugitive. From this spot the mingled tracks of the hunter and the hunted were easily traced, by reason of the deposit of lava dust, which grew thicker as the lads advanced.

Suddenly they came to an abrupt halt. Almost at their feet began the treacherous slope, ending in the horrible fissure which had been the cause of Blight's death and Mr. McKay's disaster.

Although the still sliding dust and sand had almost hidden the traces of Mr. McKay's desperate struggle to save himself from the yawning pit, there remained sufficient evidences of the disappearance of the fugitive and his pursuer.

The faces of both lads grew pale. Andy was about to rush towards the brink of the abyss when Ellerton's detaining hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"It's nothing more or less than a trap," said he. "You'll——"

The sentence remained unfinished, for from the depths of the chasm a hollow voice that the lads hardly recognised as Mr. McKay's repeated the warning:

"Stand back, lads!"

"Are you all right, sir?" shouted Ellerton.

"Yes, but you cannot get to my aid without a rope. Hurry back to the house, and bring all hands with you. A lantern will also be useful. Be as quick as you can, for it's pretty doleful down here."

"All right, sir, we'll make haste; but stand by!"

And as a parting gift Ellerton dexterously threw Mr. McKay's haversack, still containing an ample supply of food, into the pit.

Andy, however, hesitated.

"Are you sure you are all right, dad?"

"Ay, my boy. Why do you ask?"

"Because your voice sounds so strange. I suppose it's the rocks that affect it. How far did you fall?"

"I hardly know; about thirty feet, I expect; luckily the ground's soft."

"Seen anything of Blight?"

"Dead!" replied Mr. McKay.

With the utmost despatch Ellerton and Andy returned to the house, where, having told the others all they knew about the accident, they collected a couple of coils of rope, some lanterns, two strong crowbars, a hammer, and, at Ellerton's suggestion, two six-inch pulleys.

The four lads—for even Quexo insisted on coming, though he was still in a weak state of health—set off for the scene of the disaster, Andy and Terence carrying the bulk of the appliances, while Ellerton and the mulatto took only what they could place in their belts.

Cheering up the prisoner with a lusty shout of encouragement, the rescuers proceeded to drive the crowbars into a convenient crevice in the rocks, so that one was about ten feet nearer to the chasm than the other.

From the base of the outside bar to the top of the inner one, Ellerton lashed a piece of rope, then making sure that the "crows" would bear any strain that was likely to be put upon them, he attached a pulley to the base of the innermost.

Through the block was rove one of the coils of rope, one end of which he tied round his waist. Then, taking the lighted lantern in his hand, he walked cautiously towards the brink of the pit, the others paying out the rope as he went.

Before he had gone a distance of five yards the pumice dust began to slide away from under his feet, causing him to sit down on the slope, while the avalanche nearly blinded Mr. McKay as he was looking upwards for the expected relief.

"Come back, Hoppy!" shouted Andy. "Remember your arm."

"I do," replied Ellerton with a laugh. "It's giving me good cause to remember it, but I mean to make the best of it. You fellows can do more good by hauling on that rope than I can, so slack away."

Terence and Andy accordingly "slacked away," and Ellerton slid another yard or so towards the brink. He was then able to lower the lantern to Mr. McKay, and at the same time he made the discovery that the shaft was too rugged to allow a man to be hauled up by a rope without serious danger of the rope being chafed through by the sharp projections.

He explained the situation to Mr. McKay, who fully realised the force of his remarks.

"Never mind, we'll manage it right enough," con-

cluded Ellerton cheerily, and giving the word he was hauled back to where his companions stood.

"We must have one of those trees down," he said, pointing to the distant palms.

Accordingly the lads set off for the forest, where without much difficulty a stout trunk, thirty feet in length, was felled. The work of transporting it to the brink of the pit was a more tedious business, and an hour elapsed ere they succeeded in slinging the timber across the yawning gulf, where it rested with about ten feet imbedded in the soft lava on either side of the hole.

"Now you can do this part of the work better than I," said Ellerton to Andy. "Lash this block to the centre of the trunk, and reeve a rope through it."

This Andy managed to do. He also lashed a smaller piece of timber at a distance of about four feet below the tree-trunk, so as to form a platform to enable Mr. McKay to obtain a clear spring when hauled up as far as the pulley would permit.

"All ready, pater?" asked the son.

"Wait a moment, Andy. Could you manage to come down here, do you think?"

"I'll try. I say, you fellows, I'm going down, so pay out the rope."

Andy swung himself from the main beam upon the lower piece of timber, and, summoning up his courage, launched himself off from the swaying perch.

Slowly he descended, spinning round on the straining rope like a joint on a meat-jack, while at almost every second his shoulders or hips came into contact with the jagged walls of the shaft. To avoid the dust he kept his head bent downwards, and as he did so he saw the glimmer of the lantern from beneath.

"Thirty feet, do you call it?" he asked, as his feet

touched the floor of the pit, and his father grasped his hand. "It's sixty at the very least."

"I don't think so," was the reply. "You see, looking down from a height the distance always appears greater. Had the floor been hard rock, I should have been killed or at least seriously injured. But to change the subject, look here."

Mr. McKay had, during the long interval of waiting since Ellerton had lowered the lantern, made another tour of exploration, and now he led the way towards the tunnel where he had found an old musket.

He had made a strange discovery. At no very distant date a long cavern of varying height and breadth existed here. Where its entrance was Mr. McKay had not found out; but a volcanic disturbance had caused a mighty fissure to divide the original cave in two, as an examination of the strata prove conclusively.

Casting off the rope from around his waist, Andy followed his father into the tunnel-like cavern, stooping as he did so, for its mouth was barely five feet in height.

At ten paces from its mouth the passage turned almost at right angles to its former direction, and expanded into a broad and lofty chamber. Almost covering the width of the four sides was a range of arm-racks filled with old-time weapons. The candle-light flashed upon the bright barrels of musket and pistol, and glittered on the steel of bayonet, cutlass, sword, and pike, for so dry was the atmosphere that a couple of centuries had not left any appreciable trace on the metal.

"Great Scott! How did these get here?" asked Andy, after he had recovered from his astonishment.

"It's the armoury of some long-forgotten buccaneer," replied his father. "I've had plenty of time to look round since you first sent me the lantern, and none of these weapons are later than the earlier part of the

eighteenth century, or the last part of the seventeenth. See, these muskets have Vauban locks, a combination of flint and matchlock. These kinds of muskets were used at the battles of Steenkirke and Landen. You can also see that all these bayonets are the plug variety, that is to say they were plugged into the barrel of the musket, thus temporarily converting it from a firearm to a pike. These are evidently the original bayonets used in the reign of James II., so that we can fix the period at which they were stored here to within a few years, since the socket type were introduced early in the reign of William III."

In this strain Mr. McKay continued, forgetful of time and place, till Ellerton's voice was heard shouting to know of anything was amiss.

"We had better retrace our footsteps," observed Mr. McKay, "or the others will be getting alarmed. When we've found an easier way of descending into this pit—for I do not want another fall like that, I can assure you—we'll make a thorough exploration of the place."

Accordingly father and son made their way back towards the shaft, but as they turned the bend of the passage they found themselves confronted by Terence and Ellerton, each of whom carried a lantern.

"Hullo! How did you descend?" asked Andy, who was very astonished at seeing his friends down there.

"I lowered Terence, and then let myself down," replied Ellerton.

"Then, how in the name of goodness, do you expect to get back?" demanded Andy. "Quexo cannot haul us up."

"By the same means as I came down," replied the young sailor calmly. "It's easy enough with a bos'un's chair."

"Then all I can say is that I hope you lashed the pulley

on securely," rejoined Andy with evident concern. "If that goes wrong, we're trapped."

"Don't worry," replied Ellerton, somewhat ruffled at the slur cast upon his work.

"Come, come," observed Mr. McKay good-humouredly. "Don't quarrel. Now we are here we might as well continue our exploration."

Once more the armoury was inspected, the lads showing the greatest interest in the weapons, snapping the flints in order to see the sparks fly from the steel.

"Be careful, some of these muskets may be loaded," cautioned Mr. McKay. "Always make it a practice to point a weapon away from anybody when fooling about like that."

Hardly had he spoken, when a tremendous explosion shook the cave, the noise being intensified by the confined space, and Terence sat on the floor rubbing his shoulder, while a smoking musket lay by his side.

"You're a young ass," observed Andy. "Are you hurt?"

"Didn't know it was loaded," replied the youth, still clapping his hand to his shoulder.

"That's what they all say after an accident has occurred," said Mr. McKay. "By some means or the other the musket was stored without the charge being drawn. However, thank goodness it's no worse, though the concussion might have brought the roof down on our heads."

Presently Ellerton, who had wandered behind one of the arms-racks that stood about three feet from the wall, exclaimed:

"Here's another passage."

"Hold on, then," cautioned Mr. McKay. "Wait till I come. There might be a pitfall."

Carefully examining the floor of the tunnel, the ex-

plorers advanced about ten yards, when further progress was prevented by a door covered with flat iron bars.

"H'm!" ejaculated Mr. McKay. "What have we here?"

Terence was dispatched to bring a dagger and a pike from the armoury, but on further thoughts Mr. McKay forbade the lads to tamper with the door.

"Then we are done for the time being," remarked Andy. "Shall we go back for our axes?"

"A crowbar would be the thing," replied Ellerton. "But we want the two we brought."

"Probably it's as well we haven't got them," added Mr. McKay. "To tell the truth, I have my suspicions of that door, so we'll defer the opening of it till a more convenient time."

Reluctantly the lads retraced their steps to the open chasm, where Blight's body lay.

"We must bury him as soon as possible," said Mr. McKay. "There's no place here, so we must haul the body to the surface, and dig a grave in the soft earth."

"There's no soil nearer than the edge of the palm-forest," observed Andy.

"I know, but it cannot be helped."

"Isn't there a rift or a hole in the floor where we could bury him?" asked Ellerton. "After all, where does it matter, so long as he receives Christian burial?"

"We may as well look," assented Mr. McKay, and taking one of the lanterns he commenced to explore that side of the chasm which lay opposite to the tunnel leading to the buccaneers' armoury.

The first ten or twelve paces were knee deep in the pumice dust, but on approaching the wall of the abyss the floor was fairly hard, being protected from falling dirt and sand by the overhang of the shaft.

On reaching the stone face of the rift the explorers

followed its general direction without discovering any crack or crevice likely to suit their purpose, till they stumbled upon another tunnel-like shaft, similar and almost opposite to the one they had already traversed.

This tunnel was about six feet in height and four in width, and ran in a slightly upward direction. Evidently it was at one time a continuation of the other passage.

"Let's see where this leads to," exclaimed Ellerton, full of curiosity and enthusiasm. "I believe it leads to the open air."

"I think not," replied Mr. McKay, pointing to the smooth, even steps in the floor of the tunnel. "See, the floor is as dry as a bone, and covered with a thick deposit of dust. If this tunnel is open, the tropical rains would have washed the dust away."

"Then where does it lead to?" continued Ellerton. "Those arms must have been brought in by some means."

"We'll carry on and see who's right."

It was a long walk. Up and up ran the tunnel, turning slightly to the right, yet maintaining a uniform height and breadth throughout its entire length.

"This passage has been hewn out," announced Mr. McKay.

"Hasn't the other?" asked Andy.

"Only in parts. The armoury is a natural cave. Perhaps there was a smaller tunnel here before, and the people who discovered it enlarged it. It's about time we came to the end."

"Now who's right, sir?" exclaimed Ellerton triumphantly, as the pale gleam of daylight was visible from a curve of the tunnel.

"Not this child," replied Mr. McKay, without the faintest trace of chagrin. In fact, he was glad to know he was in the wrong, for he did not relish the task of

tackling the shaft and the treacherous, dust-covered slope at its edge.

A few sparse bushes masked the mouth of the tunnel, and upon these being thrust aside, the adventurers found themselves at the foot of the lowermost range of cliffs and within a hundred yards of the abyss which had been the cause of their presence in the tunnel.

Standing close to where the crowbars were driven into the rock was Quexo, looking the picture of misery, for he was perfectly convinced in his own mind that all his companions had met with disaster.

"Quexo!" shouted Andy. "Quexo! Here we are!"

The mulatto's joy was curious to behold. He danced, swung his sound arm over his head, and cut fantastic capers, the tears running down his cheeks the while as he blurted out unintelligible sentences in mingled English and Spanish.

"Well, we're safe once more, thanks to Providence," exclaimed Mr. McKay.

All the explorers looked rather disreputable, but Mr. McKay in particular was little better than a walking scarecrow. His clothes were in rags, his face clotted with dried blood and dust, while, now the excitement was over, he once more began to feel stiff and bruised from head to foot.

"By Jove, we've forgotten what we went to look for!" exclaimed Andy.

"Yes," replied Mr. McKay. "We must bring the poor fellow's body up after all."

"By the tunnel?"

"No, by the shaft."

"Then here goes," said Ellerton quietly, and drawing up one of the ropes he fastened it round his waist. Lantern in hand he slid down the sand, and getting

astride the tree-trunk, edged his way along till he reached the swaying piece of timber. The next minute he was lowering himself into the abyss.

"He's a plucky chap," commented Mr. McKay as they awaited Ellerton's signal.

"And with an arm like that," added Terence admiringly. "He really seems to make light of it."

The watchers had not long to wait.

"Haul away!" shouted Ellerton, and heaving slowly on the rope they brought the body of the unfortunate Blight to the surface, where the young seaman soon rejoined the others.

Between them they bore the corpse across the rocky plain to the edge of the palm-forest, where they dug a shallow grave with their axes.

Here the body of the ex-pearler was laid to rest, Mr. McKay recited a few prayers, and the earth was heaped over the corpse, a pile of heavy stones being placed over the grave to mark the spot.

This depressing task completed, they hastened homewards to enjoy a welcome meal and a still more desired rest.

For the next two or three weeks all hands were too busy to think of making a further exploration of the buccaneers' cave.

The damage wrought by the savages required a considerable amount of patience and hard work to set to rights. A new storehouse had to be constructed, and the various stores that had not been totally destroyed were collected and placed once more under cover.

Terence had, with considerable ingenuity, contrived to erect an electric alarm, so that the moment a foot was placed upon the lowermost path leading up to the house, a bell would ring in the sleeping quarters.

He also succeeded in rigging up the searchlight salved

from the wreck, and after many failures the apparatus worked to perfection.

Thereafter every night its great beam was directed skywards, the International Signal, "N.G." (*want immediate assistance*), being flashed in the hope of attracting the attention of any vessel within seventy miles of the island.

The little party was now completely isolated from the rest of the world.

Before the destruction of the yawl they had the means of making even a fairly long passage, but now this was denied them, for it would be utter madness to attempt to go to sea in one of the captured canoes.

So, realising that the sooner they were in possession of a seaworthy craft the better it would be for them, the inhabitants of McKay's Island debated whether it would be advisable to construct a new decked craft, convert one of the canoes into a cabin boat, or to salvage the wreck of the yawl and patch her up sufficiently to enable them to reach Tahiti.

Even with the appliances at their command, Mr. McKay reckoned that it would take a twelvemonth to make a boat large enough for their requirements. As regards reconstructing one of the canoes, he came to the conclusion that the work might be done, but the canoe being without a keel would be a bad craft in a sea-way; while her light construction would not allow a keel to be fixed without a grave risk of straining the vessel in the first breeze she encountered.

Finally, it was decided that the captured canoes should be utilised to attempt the salvage of the yawl, and on the first fine day the actual work was put in hand.

By means of rollers and a powerful jack, three of the canoes were launched and taken to the scene of the savages' wanton act.

The wrecked boat could be clearly discerned lying on

the sandy bed of the lagoon in six fathoms of water, with a slight list to starboard.

Anchoring two of the native craft close to the sunken yawl, Ellerton and Andy contrived to pass the bight of a chain under her bows, the ends of the chain being made fast to two stout cables. A similar device was employed to engage the stern of the wreck, although the fact that her keel was imbedded in the sand added to the difficulty of the task.

Two massive trunks of palm-trees were then placed across the gunwales of both canoes, converting them into a kind of pontoon.

These preparations being completed, all that was at present necessary was to wait till dead low water.

All hands knew that it would be a tedious job, for the rise of the tide was but five feet at springs and only two feet at neaps, so what work had to be done must be performed during the spring tides.

At dead low water all the slack of the four hawsers was taken in, and once more came a tedious wait for the rising tide.

Gradually the strain on the ropes increased, till the timbers groaned under the weight of the sunken boat and the canoes sank lower in the water.

"Hurrah! She's lifting!" shouted Ellerton, and allowing sufficient time for the yawl to be lifted clear of the bottom, Mr. McKay and his assistants began to haul on an anchor cable which had been previously laid towards the shore.

Slowly the ungainly pontoon with its heavy burden began to move shorewards, when suddenly the bows of the canoes rose high in the air, throwing their occupants on their backs. One of the hawsers had slipped, and the work of six long hours was wasted.

"Hard lines!" exclaimed Terence dolefully.

"It is, I admit," replied Ellerton cheerfully. "Still, we must not expect to have everything our own way. Try, try, try again, as the old saw says."

"We can do no more to-day," said Mr. McKay. "We'll leave the canoes moored to the yawl, however. That will save time to-morrow."

"I think, if you don't mind, sir, we'll try and slip the sling under her again," said Ellerton. "You see, if we do that there won't be so much chance of the canoes drifting and consequently slipping the other sling."

"Quite so," replied Mr. McKay. "It may save us some hours of hard work."

So directly the water cleared, for the settling of the wrecked boat had churned up the sand till she was practically invisible, the chain sling was again placed in position.

This time this part of the business was done more satisfactorily, as the yawl was resting on a hummock of shell and sand amidships, so that above five feet of the after part of her keel was clear of the bed of the lagoon.

"I hope it doesn't come on to blow to-night," remarked Ellerton, as the party rowed ashore. "If it does, then good-bye to the yawl."

"The glass is steady," replied Mr. McKay. "If it should pipe up, we must slip the slings and let the canoes take their chance."

That afternoon Ellerton and Andy were busy preparing additional slings, for the former was resolved not to have a repetition of the morning's failure if it could be avoided.

Just before low water on the following morning, the salvage party set out for the wreck. As Mr. McKay had predicted, the weather was fine, there being no swell to speak of within the lagoon, though as usual the breakers

were lashing themselves into milk-white foam upon the outer fringe of the reef.

Once more the slings were hove tight, and as the tide rose, the wrecked craft was again lifted from her ocean bed. Directly the yawl was "lively," as Ellerton expressed it, two more slings were passed underneath her keel so as to make doubly sure of her being swung properly.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TREASURE CHAMBER

At high water the wrecked craft was moved for a distance of nearly a hundred yards towards the shore ere she grounded. This completed the day's work, and on the following morning at low tide the "slack" was again taken in so as to enable the rising tide again to lift the yawl clear of the bottom.

This time, owing to the bed of the lagoon shoaling more rapidly, only twenty yards were gained.

"It will be a tiring and tedious job, I can see," said Terence. "How are we to manage when the hull is brought close in shore?"

"We'll have to be content to move her a few feet at a time," replied Ellerton. "It's slow work, I admit, but we are making very satisfactory progress."

With the arrival of the neap tides, the work came to a standstill, the rise of water being insufficient to justify the time and labour spent on it; so the slings were cast off and buoyed, and the canoes brought into the little natural harbour, where they would be safe from all but an exceptional on-shore gale.

During the interval, the lads utilised several spare lengths of rails, and spiking them into rough sleepers, formed a temporary hauling-up slip.

Two of the wagons were dismantled, and the axles and wheels attached to a cradle, while a winch was firmly

bolted to a secure foundation on the shore at twenty yards above high-water mark.

The rails were to be laid down at low water as far seaward as possible, and the sleepers sunk by means of heavy stones. Andy hoped to avail himself of a high spring tide to float the yawl right over the cradle, then, casting off the lashings that supported her, they could haul the wreck up by means of the winch and effect the repairs at their leisure.

Unfortunately, with the return of the spring tides a strong on-shore breeze sprang up and continued with unremitting freshness for over a week, so that the members of the salvage party were compelled temporarily to abandon their enterprise.

"Never say die," exclaimed Mr. McKay encouragingly. "Another fortnight and I hope we shall be able to resume the work. In the meantime, lads, what do you say to a kind of picnic?"

"A picnic?" asked Ellerton. "Where to?"

"I am thinking of paying another visit to the buccaneers' cave. I'm very curious to know what is on the other side of that iron-bound door, and I've no doubt you are equally so."

"Hurrah!" shouted the lads in chorus. "When shall we start?"

"In an hour," replied Mr. McKay promptly.

"Bursting open the door will be a tough job," remarked Andy. "How do you propose to do it?"

"I hope to manage it by means of an explosive," replied his father.

"Dynamite?"

"No, there's too much risk in carting a few sticks of that stuff through a tunnel a hundred yards in length or more. One slip and it would mean sudden death to the lot of us. I want a couple of fuses, however, so

while we are getting ready you can run up to the magazine and obtain them."

While Andy was away on his errand, Mr. McKay opened a few cartridges and extracted the cordite.

"This stuff is safe enough with reasonable precautions," he remarked to Ellerton, who was watching Mr. McKay with no little fear. "So long as it is not under compression cordite can be lit without the faintest danger. In the open air it merely fizzles like a damp squib."

"Couldn't we smash the door with an axe?" asked Ellerton.

"We could, but I prefer not to. In the first place there's not much room to wield an axe; in the second, as I mentioned before, I have my suspicions regarding that door."

"What suspicions, sir?"

"Wait and see!" replied Mr. McKay with a laugh.

On the arrival of Andy with the fuses, the little party set out for the cave, each member carrying part of the equipment. On gaining the summit of the hill overlooking the house, Mr. McKay scanned the horizon with his glasses to satisfy himself that no canoes were approaching the island, then, having reassured himself on that point, he gave the word to step out briskly.

"I don't want to spend a night away from the house in case anything happens," he explained.

"But do you expect another crowd of savages?"

"I didn't expect the last lot," he replied grimly, "but they came all the same."

The journey through the forest and across the rock-strewn plain was performed without incident, and within a couple of hours after leaving the house the party drew up at the mouth of the tunnel.

Here each member lit a lantern, and in a comparatively

bright light the passage of the tunnel commenced. Quexo, however, remained in the open air. Nothing could prevail upon him to descend into the bowels of the earth.

Once or twice someone stumbled, Terence falling heavily and barking his shins, while Mr. McKay's head came in contact with the roof much too often for his liking; but in high spirits the explorers crossed the floor of the abyss, traversed the second tunnel, and gained the armoury. Here they rested ere commencing the final stage of their journey underground.

At length the explorers came face to face with the mysterious iron-bound door. In spite of themselves they felt a strange sensation as they gazed upon the relic of bygone days. What lay behind it? What secret did it guard so well?

"Stand back a bit, lads, and hand me another lantern," said Mr. McKay.

Dropping on his knees, he carefully examined the floor and the iron-shod threshold of the door, probing the narrow slit with his knife. This done, he turned his attention to the walls and the crown of the arch next to the woodwork, tapping the stone with the blade of his knife with the greatest caution.

The others looked on with interest not unmingled with curiosity and awe. At length, apparently satisfied with the examination, Mr. McKay rose.

"I want you to bore a hole here," said he to Andy, pointing out a place in the door barely two inches from the floor.

Andy, armed with a ratchet-brace, began his task, and the subdued silence of the underground passage was broken only by the rattle of the pawl and the sharp burr of the bit as it wormed its way steadily through the stout oaken plank.

"It's hot work," exclaimed Andy, who in order to use the brace in that most inconvenient place was obliged to lie full length on the floor.

"I know, but keep it up," replied Mr. McKay, who, grasping a crowbar, was standing astride his son's feet.

"Stand a bit farther back," he continued, addressing Ellerton and Terence.

The two lads instantly obeyed, though they wondered at Mr. McKay's alert and expectant attitude.

Suddenly, like the tongue of an enormous serpent, a double-pronged barb of steel flashed dully in the candle-light, passing completely across the passage and about three feet above and over Andy's prostrate body.

In an instant Mr. McKay's powerful arm brought the crowbar upward in a resistless sweep, and with one blow severed the dreadful device of death.

The lads, pale with the excitement and horror of the incident, could only utter an exclamation of astonishment while Andy hurriedly backed away from the well-guarded door.

"Pleasant, isn't it?" remarked Mr. McKay in a cool matter-of-fact tone, as if such incidents were of an everyday occurrence. "I had my suspicions, as I said more than once before. That device was cunningly contrived to salute marauders in a very forcible manner. Had either of us been standing in front of the door we should have been transfixed in a jiffy. Now, carry on, Andy. I don't think there's anything more to be feared on this side of the door, at any rate."

But Andy was not equal to the task. The risky experience had, to use his own words, completely knocked the stuffing out of him.

"Let's quit; the game's not worth the candle," said Terence.

"Rather not!" replied Mr. McKay, resolutely. "There's something worth securing behind that door, or the former owners would not have taken such elaborate and crafty steps to guard it. Here, Ellerton, stand by with the crowbar in case of accidents, and I'll finish boring the hole."

So saying, Mr. McKay took up a position similar to that formerly occupied by his son and plied the brace vigorously.

Ere the bit had sunk another quarter of an inch there came a dull metallic sound from the remote side of the door.

"What's that?" gasped Andy breathlessly.

"Another surprise for trespassers," replied his father without ceasing in his work. "I've released another secret spring, I suppose. However, we are on the right side of the door this time."

Having bored the hole sufficiently deep for his purpose Mr. McKay proceeded to insert the cordite, ramming it tightly home with the end of the crowbar. The rest of the explosive he laid close to the base of the door, covering it with stones and pieces of rock brought from the floor of the chasm.

"Now let's go back to the other tunnel," he continued, after the detonator and the fuse had been inserted and the latter fired. "There's no hurry; the explosion will not take place for five minutes."

As the moments sped, the lads awaited in breathless silence the sound of the detonation.

Presently a dull rumble echoed through the rocky passage, followed by a blast of air mingled with the acrid fumes of the cordite.

"Not so fast! Not so fast!" cautioned Mr. Mc-

Kay, as the lads began to run towards the hitherto baffling barrier. "Some of the rock may be dislodged."

As it was, they were obliged to wait some considerable time, as the atmosphere in the tunnel was so vile that it was impossible to breathe with comfort. Then as the mist gradually cleared, the dull yellow glare of the lanterns revealed a mass of shattered woodwork where the door had stood; while a foot beyond was a barrier of steel rods, which, serving the purpose of a portcullis, had fallen from above.

"That's what we heard fall," observed Mr. McKay. "The idea was, I suppose, that any unauthorised person who escaped the lance-thrust on this side of the door would, on opening it, be impaled by them weapons concealed in the roof. Now to settle with this obstruction."

A few powerful strokes with an axe shattered enough bars to enable Mr. McKay to squeeze through, and, followed by his eager companions, he entered the mysterious cavern.

At first there was little to attract the attention of the explorers. The cave was of irregular form, being about fifty feet in length, thirty in breadth, and varying in height from twenty-five to six feet.

On the floor were six wooden chests, ordinary in appearance and apparently of simple construction; they would have easily been mistaken for seamen's chests placed in a lumber-room.

Striding up to the nearest one, Mr. McKay raised the lid. There was no creaking of rusty hinges, no glitter of gold and jewels to dazzle the eyes. The chest was empty!

"Well, this is a sorry trick to have played on one another after so much trouble." commented he

with a forced laugh. He was visibly disappointed, and his discouragement was shared by his companions.

"No doubt this has been the hiding-place of some great hoard," he continued. "But the buccaneering rascals have evidently removed their booty. I've drawn a blank, so you, Ellerton, try your hand."

The second chest was opened with equal ease, but to the unbounded delight of the whole party the coffer was two-thirds filled with yellow metal ingots, which flashed dully in the light of the lanterns.

"Gold!" was the chorus of exclamation.

"Gold it is," added Mr. McKay. "But a deal of good it will do us in our present state! However, let's continue the examination."

The remaining four coffers gave more trouble, the lids being secured by stout iron screws. Two were filled with gold and silver ornaments, cups, vases, and plates —the plunder, doubtless, of many a rich city of Spain's colonies on the shores of the Pacific. The remaining two were laden with virgin gold.

"Well, lads," exclaimed Mr. McKay, when the last coffer had been forced to disclose its contents, "once we get this stuff safely to a civilised country we shall be rich beyond our wildest imagination. We'll share and share alike, of course."

"What is the value of the treasure?" asked Ellerton in an awestruck voice, for the sudden avalanche of untold wealth had wellnigh upset him.

"Goodness only knows! There's enough to enable you to go through life without doing another stroke of work. That is, of course, when you are home in England once more. But, my lad, don't look upon it in that light. Take my word for it that idleness is a curse, and the wealth, if used solely to promote idleness, would serve

a better purpose if it lay a thousand fathoms deep on the bed of the ocean."

"If ever I take my share back to my home, I trust I'll use it to a good purpose," said Ellerton.

"I trust so, too," added Mr. McKay. "Now, let us see if there's anything else of interest here. I am anxious to examine these murderous devices. Ah!"

Mr. McKay pointed in the direction of the shattered door. On either side, but separated from the entrance tunnel by a massive wall composed of the solid rock, was a narrow and lofty passage, both running parallel with the tunnel.

Lantern in hand, Mr. McKay stooped down and entered the right-hand recess, and to his surprise he found no fewer than six steel lances, each accompanied by a tightly coiled spring, while a seventh had uncoiled itself, the spiral spring stretching from wall to wall.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed with thankfulness. "We've had a fortunate escape. Each of these fiendish contrivances is set to launch itself into the tunnel on the outside of the door. The one we released is the nearest."

"Then we must have passed them?" asked Andy.

"Yes, and by the intervention of Providence they failed to act. Watch!"

And touching a slender steel rod that passed from the front of one of the springs to the floor, Mr. McKay gave it a sharp upward jerk.

Instantly the hidden coil released itself, and the dread weapon disappeared through the rock which separated the cave-like recess from the tunnel.

"The whole contrivance, though deadly, is comparatively simple," explained Mr. McKay. "Underneath

the floors of both chambers are a number of levers. The weight of a person treading in the tunnel would cause the lever to move a rod, which in turn releases a finely set trigger which controls the springs. Owing to years of idleness the levers failed to act, and only Andy's continuous exertions as he lay on the ground in front of the door caused one of the springs to be released. I bargained for one, but not a dozen or more, by Jove ! "

" A dozen ? " echoed Terence.

" Aye, a dozen at least. We'll find six or seven more on the other side of the tunnel."

One by one the remaining springs were released, and on entering the left-hand cavity a similar state of things was revealed.

" I don't think we need fear these any longer," continued Mr. McKay, as the sound of the releasing of the last spring vibrated in the confined space. " Now the question is, what is to be done with the stuff ? " and he indicated the coffers with a wave of his hand.

" Leave it here," suggested Andy.

" I would but for one reason. If we are taken off the island by a passing ship, the captain would not feel inclined to waste time while we were bringing these chests from here to the shore, for, of course, we could not reveal the nature of their contents. No ; I propose to cart the whole of the treasure back to the house, stow it away in small boxes that are convenient to handle, and bury the boxes a few feet under the floor."

Each member of the party thereupon filled his haversack with as much gold as it would hold, until the stout canvas straps cut into the shoulders of the wearers ; and thus laden they retraced their steps,

arriving on the surface in a breathless and exhausted condition.

Here the loads were redistributed, and making better progress, the wearied adventurers arrived at their dwelling just as the sun dipped beyond the lofty peak of the island.

CHAPTER XXIII

"A SAIL! A SAIL!"

TWICE daily on each of the succeeding days Mr. McKay and his companions paid a hurried visit to the treasure-cave, and at the end of that time the bulk of the buccaneers' spoil was safely hidden in the spot chosen for its reception.

Then, with the return of the spring tides, the work of salving the yawl was resumed.

Slowly, yet without a hitch, the sunken craft was moved towards the cradle which awaited its burden, till the falling off of the tides found the yawl within ten yards of low-water mark.

"I have been thinking, pater," observed Andy one day, as they were preparing to revisit the cave.

"Thinking what, my boy?"

"Why, every journey we make to the cavern we perform practically empty-handed. Would it not be well to carry a supply of provisions with us and store them in the cave? You see, if those savages should return we might be glad of a retreat."

"Quite true, though I sincerely hope we shall not be put to such straits. However, we'll take a few barrels of provisions and some rifles and ammunition as well."

"And water?"

"Ay, but that's the rub. Water is heavy to carry

about, and as far as I can see there's no spring or brook within a mile of the entrance to the cave."

"I wonder if there's water to be found above the cliffs in which lies the mouth of the tunnel. I noticed several small streams when I climbed the mountain, though, of course, I didn't ascend on that side. I think I'll explore that slope as soon as possible."

"Why not to-day? Ellerton and you can do so while we are making our midday trip back to the house."

Accordingly, instead of ascending the tunnel with Mr. McKay and Terence, the two chums clambered up the face of the cliff. At the top they found that the land sloped steeply towards the peak, the ground being thickly covered with stunted bushes and occasional clumps of palms.

"Look here, Hoppy," remarked Andy, as they sat down to recover their breadth after their fatiguing climb. "It's all very well living on an island when everything goes well, but we can't say that it is now. Perhaps it's a useless fear, but I fear that there's always the possibility of those savage brutes coming back here in overwhelming numbers and wiping us out. That does not tend to make things comfortable, although it may tend to liven things up."

"But they had such a terrible smashing last time," replied Ellerton.

"True! But didn't we give them a good licking when they pursued us in their canoes? That didn't prevent them repeating their unwelcome attentions."

"I hope you don't mean to show the white feather, Andy?"

"Not I. If there's a dust-up, I'll do my best; but, at the same time, I shan't be sorry to get the yawl repaired and say good-bye to the island. The treasure can wait till we charter a steamer to fetch it."

"Well, the savages haven't returned, so we can still make the best of things," replied Ellerton cheerfully. "But we must be moving or we'll find no water."

The two lads had not gone fifty yards ere they came across a small stream. Andy bent down, and raising some of the water in the palm of his hand applied it to his lips.

"Fresh as one could wish," he pronounced.

"Good! Now we'll follow its course and see if it approaches the mouth of the cave."

The rivulet, for it was nothing more, wended its way in an almost semicircular direction, till, at about two hundred yards from where the lads had struck it, it emptied itself into a rift in the rocks, the splash of its fall echoing dimly from apparently unfathomable depths.

"Look! We are not very far from that part of the cliff that overhangs the mouth of the cave," exclaimed Ellerton. "What is to prevent us from digging a shallow trench and conducting the water right to the entrance to the tunnel?"

"It's fairly hard rock." objected Andy, "It will be no end of a task cutting a new watercourse."

"Then we can use some of the cast-iron pipes we brought ashore," continued the young seaman, determined not to be overcome by early difficulties. "There are more than enough to cover this distance, and by damming the stream we can——"

"Yes, that's all very well, but if we are compelled to beat a retreat to the cave the savages will find the pipes and so discover our hiding-place."

"I'm afraid that will make but little difference. The trail from the house up the mouth of the tunnel is so well defined that a blind man might follow it. Why, whatever is the matter with you, Andy? You seem to throw cold water on every suggestion that is made. You are not always like that. Are you ill?"

"I believe I am," replied Andy. "At least, I do not feel quite up to the mark."

"Then let's get back," said Ellerton, and assisting his chum over the rough ground the pair returned to the mouth of the tunnel just as the others were emerging.

"Any luck?" asked Mr. McKay cheerfully; then realising that his son looked ill, he exclaimed: "What have you been doing, Andy?"

"I don't know, father. I feel absolutely rotten."

They managed to get him back to the house, his teeth chattering with the cold; but before night he was in a high fever. His father administered liberal doses of quinine, of which there was a plentiful supply; but, in spite of this remedy, the lad's illness increased, and before morning he was in a delirium, raving about the sunken yawl and the savages. More than once he attempted to leave his bed and seize a rifle, and it required the united efforts of Mr. McKay, Ellerton, and Terence to hold him down.

It was an anxious time. Mr. McKay had had experience of this kind of malady, and knew that should the patient leave his bed and take cold, he must die.

For forty-eight hours Mr. McKay, the two lads, and Quexo kept ceaseless watch, the mulatto being particularly attentive in his duties; but at length the feverish state was succeeded by a profuse sweat, and Mr. McKay knew that for the present the dreaded disaster was averted.

During the lengthy period of convalescence, someone had to be within call of the patient, but the others resumed their outdoor occupation.

Most of the traces of the last visit of the savages had been removed; the cliff-path leading up from the shore had been fortified by the erection of a loop-holed palisade, so as to command the approach by rifle-fire; while the remainder of the treasure had been brought from

the cave to the house, and the former was well provisioned in case of emergency.

Ellerton also found time to carry out his project of conducting fresh water into the cave. By the aid of Terence and Quexo he contrived to lay a line of pipes from the stream down the slope to the edge of the cliff overhanging the entrance, whence a tiny cascade fell over the rocks within a few feet of the tunnel.

Later on, at Mr. McKay's suggestion, the line of iron pipes was continued down the face of the cliff, though concealed by the bushes, and carried a few yards into the tunnel. For most of that distance the pipes were covered by the thick dust, till sufficiently far from the entrance to enable the occupants to defend the end of the aqueduct if necessary.

The water, on escaping, ran down the incline, till absorbed by the pumice dust, although by degrees it cut for itself a channel close to the sides of the tunnel. Thus a plentiful supply of the precious liquid was assured, and at the same time no inconvenience was caused by the waste turning the floor of the passage into a swamp.

The rainy season was shortly due, and unable, on account of Andy's weakness, to complete the salvage of the yawl, since every available hand was necessary, the wrecked boat was again rafted farther out into the lagoon and allowed to sink to the bottom, so as to lie in safety during the on-shore gales.

One morning Ellerton set out as usual to attend to the sheep, which were in a thriving state, having so increased in numbers that new pasture grounds had to be provided for them.

It was then blowing strongly from the north-east and almost dead on shore. Happening to glance seaward, he was surprised to see a topsail schooner, under close-reefed canvas, running past the island.

For a moment or so he remained gazing with astonishment at the unwonted sight: then, recovering himself, he ran as hard as he could to the house.

"A sail! A sail!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

Everyone, including Andy, ran out of the house, and, as Ellerton had announced, there was the schooner now abreast of the entrance of the lagoon, but still keeping on her course to the south-west.

"Bring out the signal-book and the flags," ordered Mr. McKay. "And you, Quexo, make a fire."

Ellerton soon returned with the bunting, and the Union Jack was hoisted to the masthead. The mulatto procured some dry wood from the store, and set it in a blaze. When well alight, he piled a quantity of damp leaves upon the fire, causing a thick smoke.

Unfortunately the strong wind prevented the vapour from rising, the smoke drifting over the ground in thick, suffocating columns, but to the castaways' great joy the vessel hoisted her ensign. It was the French tricolour.

"Hurrah!" shouted Mr. McKay. "Now lads, hand me N and C."

The next instant the N and C flags, signifying in the International code, "*Want assistance*," were fluttering from the mast.

Through the telescope the inhabitants of McKay's Island could see the oilskin-clad figure of the French skipper, his neatly-trimmed moustache and imperial as correct as if he were on the boulevards of Paris, rushing hither and thither, and giving his orders with much waving of his arms. Then, as a string of flags ran up to her main truck, the schooner was hove-to.

"*D.C.—Are coming to your assistance*," read Mr. McKay, referring to his signal-book. "By Jove! that won't do, the boat will be swamped," for already some of the crew were manning the falls.

"A SAIL! A SAIL!" HE EXCLAIMED BREATHLESSLY

To face page 210.

"Sharp there," he continued, "'*E.Y.—Do not attempt to land in your boat.*' That will stop them; but there's no denying that they are plucky fellows."

In obedience to the signal, the crew of the French schooner gave up their attempt, and a lengthy interchange of signals was kept up, the Frenchman promising to report the presence of the castaways at the first port she touched; then, with a farewell dip of her ensign, she flung about, and half an hour later she was lost in the haze.

"That's a load off our minds," remarked Mr. McKay. "We can reasonably expect help in a month at the very outside."

"Unless she is blown out of her course, for a gale is freshening," replied Ellerton.

"Nevertheless, the chances are greatly in our favour, though at the same time we must not cease our efforts to work out our salvation. This gale will doubtless mark the end of the rainy season, so we can hope to renew our efforts to salve the yawl within the next few days."

But, contrary to Mr. McKay's expectations, the weather continued bad for nearly a month and, although a sharp look-out was kept by day and the searchlights flashed nightly, no vessel appeared in sight. Alternate hopes and fears did not tend to improve the spirits of the castaways, and ere the fine weather set in their condition was bordering on acute depression, in spite of their individual efforts to the contrary.

At length, after a long spell of rainy weather, the sun burst forth in all its splendour, the wind went away, and the island appeared under a totally different aspect from that which it had shown during the last six months. With the return of the dry season, the spirits of the castaways likewise rose, and energetically they resumed their outdoor labours.

The submerged yawl was, so far as they could see,

little the worse for its prolonged rest on the bed of the lagoon, and by dint of hard and painstaking work she was moved nearer to the shore than she had been since the disastrous day when she had been scuttled by the natives.

"It will be new moon to-morrow at about ten o'clock," announced Mr. McKay. "Consequently there will be a fairly high tide at noon, so we can reasonably hope for sufficient water to float the yawl to the cradle. Everything is ready, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ellerton. "I finished rigging the tackle this morning, and the cradle is properly ballasted."

"Good! Then we'll make the attempt to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXIV

A FALSE AND A REAL ALARM

BEFORE daybreak everyone was up and eager for the fray, and directly breakfast was over they sallied down to the shore. It was still pitch dark, but the time of dead low water made it absolutely necessary that operations should commence ere the sun rose.

By the light of several lanterns the slack of the hawsers was taken in and the two canoes pinned down so far as the united efforts of all hands would permit. Nothing more could be done till the rising of the tide.

The cradle, its ends marked by long poles to indicate its position at high water, was already run out so far as the lines of the slipway extended, a rope being fastened to it from the windlass ashore.

Anxiously the little group of workers watched the tide rise slowly, inch by inch, up the temporary tide gauge. Sometimes it paused as a "false ebb" in the offing stayed its progress, till at length it crept within a few inches of its predicted height.

"There's enough water now, I fancy," announced Ellerton, "so heave away. Gently does it!"

It was an anxious time. Slowly the two canoes were warped shorewards, guided by a pair of ropes abeam so as to insure the wrecked boat being deposited evenly on the cradle. Already the two outer poles of the cradle were passed, when a slight shock told the salvors that the yawl's forefoot had touched the cradle.

"Avast there!" shouted Ellerton to Terence and Quexo, who were hauling on the shore.

"There's not enough water," exclaimed Andy, with dismay written on his face.

"Ten minutes yet before high water," announced Mr. McKay. "Will she do it, I wonder?"

For answer Ellerton slipped off his clothes and plunged over the side of the canoe. Mr. McKay and Andy could follow his movements as he descended with slow yet powerful strokes, till he disappeared from view beneath the submerged craft. Half a minute later he reappeared, and swam alongside the canoe, into which he was assisted by the eager spectators.

"She'll do it," he announced, when he had recovered his breath. "We are a bit out in our reckoning; her keel is touching the side of the cradle."

Five minutes later the yawl was lying immediately over the slipway, the slings were cast off, and slowly she settled upon the carriage prepared for her reception. The canoes were warped clear, and all that remained to be done was to man the winch and heave the cradle above high-water mark.

In spite of the broiling sun, the work of winding the winch was begun, for the delighted lads would not be persuaded to delay the operation till the cool of the day. Foot by foot the cradle came home, till the huge barnacle-covered hull began to appear above the water.

"What a state she's in," exclaimed Andy, as the lads rested from their labours, for they were thoroughly played out. "There's a week's scraping in front of us before we can do anything else."

"Hadn't we better see about baling her out?" asked Terence. "Directly she ceases to be water-borne the pressure of the water will burst her seams."

"No fear of that," replied Mr. McKay. "The water

will find its way out of the hole that the natives made in her."

"I guess the motor is pretty rusty," continued Terence.

"It may not be," Andy replied. "You see, I kept it smothered in grease, and unless those brutes smashed it, it ought to be capable of being repaired. But I am awfully anxious to see, so what do you say to another turn at the winch?"

Once more the lads resumed their work of hauling up the cradle, till nearly the whole of the streaming, weed-covered hull—a forlorn waif from the sea—was visible.

"Another five yards, lads," exclaimed Ellerton cheerfully. "Now, put more beef into it."

As he spoke, there was a warning shout from Mr. McKay, but the warning came too late. Ere the lads could realise the extent of their misfortune the cradle collapsed and the hull of the yawl crashed over on her side.

With a horrible rending of the shattered timbers, the enormous mass pitched fairly on a jagged rock; the next instant the object of so many months' tedious toil lay on its broadside, hopelessly damaged.

For quite a minute all hands gazed in speechless grief upon the scene of calamity. To have the fruits of victory snatched from their lips seemed almost more than they could realise, till by degrees the extent of their misfortune began to assert itself.

"Is she really done for?" said Andy, his voice barely raised above a whisper.

"Yes, her back's broken," replied his father. "She will never float again."

"Then, by George!" announced Andy, speaking in a tone that surprised his companions by its resolution, "I won't be done. I begin to build another craft to-morrow. Come on, pater, let's get something to eat, and

after that we'll set out the plans for our new craft. Buck up, Hoppy, it's no use crying over spilt milk."

Inspired by their companion's cheerfulness, the lads turned their backs upon the scene of their ill-favoured labours and set off towards the house. They now felt specially anxious to devote their energies to the new task that lay before them, and already their late misfortune was being regarded as a thing of the past.

"Without wishing to discourage you, Andy," began Mr. McKay, after the meal was over, "I think we had better give up all idea of building another craft. I've been going carefully into this matter, and I'll tell you why I form this conclusion. You see there's no timber growing on this island that can be used, and our own stock is insufficient even if we make use of the planks of the wrecked yawl. So I think the best thing we can do is to convert one of the canoes——"

"But I thought we had already decided that they are unsuitable and unseaworthy ?"

"Quite so. As they are at present I should hesitate to make a long voyage in one of them, although the natives frequently travel great distances in this type of craft. So I think if we give the smallest canoe—for that one seems the handiest—a good keelson, bolt a false keel into it, and provide her with some stout timbers and stringers, she'll answer our purpose. We can use most of the deck planks of the yawl to deck-in the canoe. Her sails and most of her gear will come in handy."

"It would certainly save a lot of work," replied Andy, for in calmer moments the size of his proposed task had begun to assert itself.

"Then let's make a start," added Ellerton. "There's no time like the present, so I vote we begin to dismantle the remains of the yawl, examine and overhaul her canvas, and remove the ballast."

"I haven't measured the smallest canoe," remarked Andy. "What's her length, do you think?"

"About twenty-eight feet in length, nine in breadth, and two feet draught, though with the addition of a false keel and ballast she will draw at least four feet."

Accordingly all hands set to work with a will, and ere nightfall the shattered hull of the yawl was a mere shell, the gear being stowed away in the lower storehouse.

"To-morrow we'll make a start with the canoe," said Ellerton, as they prepared to retire for the night. "There are plenty of pieces of timber to shore her up, and wedges can easily be made. Before the end of the week we ought to have her keel and keelson bolted on."

"Then sleep well on it," added Mr. McKay, "for there's much to be done."

The inhabitants of McKay's Island had already made their customary signal with the searchlight, the power had been switched off, and the canvas hood placed over the instrument for the purpose of protecting it from the night dews. This routine was always the last ere the day's work ended.

Mr. McKay was about to close the door of the dwelling-house when a rapid and prolonged ringing of the electric alarm bell broke upon the stillness of the night.

Instantly there was a rush for the arms-rack where the rifles were kept ready for immediate use, and, securing their weapons, the whole party made for the open, Terence, according to a prearranged plan, running to the power-house to switch on the current, while the others took up their position at the palisade commanding the cliff-path.

The night was pitch dark; a light breeze ruffled the palm trees, but beyond that all was still. Peering into the darkness the defenders waited, finger on trigger, to open fire on the first appearance of the foe.

Then the alarm bell began to ring again.

"There's someone climbing the path," whispered Ellerton, when the din had died away.

"I wish Terence would hurry up with the searchlight; we could then see who the intruders are. There it is again," as the clanging of the bell commenced for the third time.

In his natural anxiety and haste, Terence fumbled over his task, but at length the carbons fused and the giant beam of the searchlight threw its dazzling rays seaward. Then, trained by Donaghue's guiding hand, it swept the lower terraces and the beach, but neither hostile canvas nor lurking bloodthirsty warriors came within its blinding glare.

"There's someone moving down there," exclaimed Andy, pointing towards the foot of the steep path. "See! To the right of that great boulder."

"Hanged if I can," muttered Ellerton. Nevertheless he took aim with his rifle at the spot indicated by his chum.

"It's only the shadows thrown by the moving beam," said Mr. McKay. "Terence, keep the light steady for a moment, will you?"

The now stationary ray revealed the fact that some moving object was creeping cautiously over the rock-strewn beach immediately at the end of the path.

"There's someone down there," whispered Ellerton, and almost as he spoke the alarm bell resumed its shrill warning.

"I'm going down to see who or what it is," announced Mr. McKay, leaning his rifle against the stockade and drawing a revolver.

Accompanied by Andy, Ellerton and Quexo, he descended the steep and rugged path.

All at once Mr. McKay burst into a hearty laugh, his companions joining in as soon as they perceived the cause

A HUGE TURTLE HAD CRAWLED ACROSS THE BEACH AND . . .
HAD SET THE ALARM BELL RINGING

To face page 219.

of his mirth. A huge turtle had crawled across the beach and was digging a hole in the sand with its flippers. This had set the alarm bell ringing.

As the larder needed filling, the turtle was dispatched and dragged up to the house.

It was late in the forenoon of the next day ere the inmates turned out of their beds, for the previous night's diversion had deprived them of a fair share of their accustomed sleep.

"Buck up and fill the kettle, Quexo," shouted Andy "I'm right hungry."

The mulatto, taking a can in his hand, set out for the stream, but hardly had he stepped outside the door when he returned with consternation written all over his face.

"Massa! Massa!" he gasped. "Canoes! Heap, plenty, much, great canoes!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE GREAT INVASION

QUEXO's warning was only too true. Less than a mile from the reef the sea was dotted with the brown mat sails of a large fleet of native craft all heading for the island.

"Forty canoes at least, by Jove!" ejaculated Mr. McKay. "And taking twenty men to each—a low average—that means there are eight hundred of the wretches making straight for us."

"It's long odds," replied Ellerton grimly, "but we'll do our best, and perhaps we may find a means of driving them off."

"I should have thought the last little surprise would have settled them. We must give them credit for their persistence. There's one thing to our advantage, though; it's a day attack, and we are more or less prepared for it. But what are they up to now?"

The advancing canoes had now reached the entrance to the lagoon, and, with marvellous precision, their sails were lowered, and the crews took to their paddles. Then, instead of heading straight for the beach, the whole flotilla turned its course parallel with the shore.

"That's bad," remarked Mr. McKay, pausing in the act of dragging a box of ammunition from the house to the stockade. "They have learnt a lesson, and now they mean to take us on the flank or in

the rear. Come on, lads, there's no time to be lost. We must follow them and see if we can prevent them landing."

Fortunately the savages' idea of strategy was not very advanced. Instead of keeping one section of their fleet for the purpose of making a feint or a frontal attack while the other canoes skirted the island, the whole of the boats kept together.

Loaded with ammunition-belts and carrying their rifles, the little band of defenders toiled up the path leading to the interior till they reached the summit of the cliffs overlooking the house. Then, bearing away to the left, they hastened to keep pace with their savage invaders.

Through the palm-groves, fighting their way between patches of thick, prickly scrub, Mr. McKay and his companions continued their wearisome march, till, from the summit of the ridge that separated their bay from the one where they had first landed, they saw that the hostile canoes had gained considerably.

The usually calm waters of the lagoon were broken into thousands of ripples by the swift-moving craft, while the cliffs re-echoed to the regular beats of their paddles. Yet, without attempting to land on that part of the shore, the savages continued their roundabout voyage.

"It's no use going any farther," gasped Mr. McKay breathlessly. "We are only tiring ourselves out to no purpose. A hundred well-armed men would be powerless to prevent them landing."

"Then what's to be done?"

"We must return to the house and make every possible use of the few hours that as yet remain to us. I quite admit I have been guilty of a serious error of omission. While paying great attention to our seaward

defences, we have entirely neglected the landward approach."

On return to the terrace on which stood the dwelling-house and the power-station, the already wearied defenders immediately set to work to fortify the approach from the interior of the island.

Sixty yards from the house began the narrow defile that afforded a road between the settlement and the treasure cave. On either side the cliffs towered to nearly one hundred feet, so that once the savages took possession of those heights the terrace could not be held.

"I suppose we cannot launch one of the canoes, provision her, and make a dash for safety?" asked Terence.

"It's too risky," replied Mr. McKay. "If seen, we should be overhauled in less than half-an-hour. No, we must stick to this place and hold it to the last, so let's set to at once."

With the energy of despair all hands worked with feverish desperation, their loaded rifles lying within easy reach, while every moment they expected to hear the savage shouts of their bloodthirsty foes.

Across the foot of the defile they dug a shallow trench, lining the inner side with boxes, crates, and other articles so as to form a barricade. It was a feeble defence at the most, but with five skilled riflemen armed with modern rifles behind it, the breastwork might serve its purpose.

To guard against a shower of missiles from the summit of the adjacent cliffs, a lean-to roof of stout planks was hastily constructed, earth being thrown upon it to deaden the shock of heavy stones, while the remaining boxes of ammunition were brought up so that the supply was ready to hand.

"Look here, Quexo," said Mr. McKay, "go to the stockade at the top of the cliff-path, and keep watch.

Don't move, whatever happens, till we call you, even if you hear us firing; but if you see any signs of the savages landing on the beach, fire your rifle. You understand?"

"Yas, massa," replied the mulatto, and snatching up his rifle he ran to his appointed post as quickly as his legs could carry him.

"We mustn't forget water and provisions, Ellerton," said Mr. McKay. "They must be brought ready to hand, for if the fighting is prolonged we will have no time to go to the house for food and drink."

"I'll bring some biscuits and water," replied Ellerton. "I remember how dry I was during the last attack. But, do you know, sir, I begin to feel quite hopeful, now our defences are completed."

"It's certainly improved the situation, Hoppy," replied Mr. McKay. "But we've a tough job in front of us. Eight or nine hundred savages, each eager for a fight and keen on plundering us. We must not be overconfident. But now cut off and get the provisions and water."

Ellerton quickly performed his task, and, having placed the water and biscuits in the spot indicated by Mr. McKay, he observed:

"It's a pity we can't use some of that dynamite again."

"We cannot make the trucks run up hill, and, besides, there are no rails, if that's what you mean."

"No, sir, I know that," was the reply, "but I thought that if we could place a few tins of the stuff on those rocks we could easily manage to put a bullet through them at two hundred yards."

"By all means we'll try it," said Mr. McKay heartily. "As I've often said, you're a brick."

Accordingly Ellerton ran to the cave where the explosive

was stored, and returned at a walking pace with nearly forty pounds of the dangerous compound.

"Don't use all of it," said Mr. McKay. "Here, take these three tins; they'll be a better mark for us."

Into each of the metal boxes Ellerton placed about ten pounds of the explosive, adding a few handfuls of iron, nails, and bits of scrap metal. Then, climbing over the breastwork, he was handed the rough-and-ready bombs.

Thus laden he cautiously made is way up the rough defile till he reached a spot about two hundred yards from the defenders' position.

Here a mass of fallen rock, the highest part ten feet in height, formed a suitable site for his operations, and without mishap the tin canisters were placed in such a position that they could readily be seen above the heads of any number of savages likely to come between them and the defences.

Meanwhile Mr. McKay was busily engaged in preparing a number of hand-bombs, charging several small tins with explosive mixed with nails, and lashing a short length of thin rope securely to each completed missile.

"I'm going to place these things here," said he, pointing to a small cleft in the cliff. "Be careful not to knock them, or we shall punish ourselves."

"How are you going to throw them?" asked Ellerton, who had meanwhile returned from his expedition. "If they fall too close they will do us harm, and I don't think they can be thrown more than the length of a cricket-pitch."

"By this," replied Mr. McKay, holding up a short stick with a notch cut in one end. "I lay the rope along the stick and jam its end between the palm of my hand and the wood. By swinging the stick a greatly increased

power is obtained; at the right moment the cord is released and the bomb flies off at a tangent."

"I see," replied Ellerton, and although he had great faith in Mr. McKay, he found himself wondering what the result would be did the missile not fly off at the correct tangent.

Slowly the hours dragged, for, all the preparations for the defence being completed, the tedious and nerve-racking ordeal of waiting for the fray told more upon the energies of the defenders than would the actual fight.

The sun was sinking low ere the alert watchers detected the distant shouts of the savages.

"They've found the trail leading to the cave, I fancy," remarked Mr. McKay. "They'll be here before dark, unless I'm much mistaken. Terence, you had better start the dynamo and see that the searchlight is ready for use. Tell Quexo to come here and take your place. You must take sole charge of the seaward side of our defences. Now, listen: whatever you do, don't train the searchlight this way till I discharge my rifle. Keep the rays playing on the shore, and occasionally flash the beam skywards. It may bring us aid. When you hear the shot, slew the projector round and direct the beam straight up the defile. You quite understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Terence. "You can rely upon me."

"I feel sure of it," was the quiet reply, as the lad set off on his responsible and single-handed task.

"It will soon be dark," said Ellerton. "That will be all the better for us, for these brutes won't find their way so easily."

"I don't think the darkness will stop them, provided they are not afraid of it. These savages can find their way by night like cats. Hullo, Quexo, tired, eh?"

"No, massa, not berry tired. One eye he go sleep, den oder eye he go sleep."

"Quexo means to go to sleep with one eye open," said Andy. "We ought to take a leaf from his book."

"Yes, we'll feel the want of sleep as much as anything," replied his father. "Once the attack opens there will be little respite. It wouldn't be a bad idea if you three were to snatch a few moments' rest. I'll wake you up in time, never fear."

This advice was acted upon, Andy, Ellerton, and Quexo stretching themselves out on the ground at the foot of the barricade, and in a few minutes, in spite of their risky position, the lads were sleeping soundly.

Night had now fallen, and the ghostly white beams of the searchlight swept the shore, the noise of the distant surf mingling with the subdued fizzing of the carbons as Terence diligently attended to the working of the projector.

The far-off shouts of the savages had now ceased. Probably the invaders, satisfied with the success of their unopposed landing, were awaiting the dawn ere they commenced their attack.

Silence, when intent upon a hand-to-hand conflict, was a stranger to them, and for this Mr. McKay was thankful, since few things are more trying than the expectation of a sudden onslaught by an unseen and unheard foe.

Notwithstanding this peculiarity on the part of the invaders, Mr. McKay did not for one moment relax his vigilance. Rifle in hand he stood, rarely altering his position, and gazed stedfastly in the direction of the defile, his ears alert for the faintest footfall or shout that might denote the approach of the bloodthirsty savages.

Although the defenders were cut off from their carefully prepared retreat in the treasure cave, another shelter yet remained. The cavern where Blight had

been kept a prisoner had been since used as a temporary storehouse for several casks of provisions. As a last resource it could be held, possibly for a month.

But if the natives took the island and showed no disposition to leave, after having plundered the white man's possessions, even that refuge would be a means of only prolonging the sufferings of the defenders.

Hopeful as he generally was, Mr. McKay fully realised that he and his companions were in a very tight fix, and unless the skill and resource of civilisation could overcome the superior numbers and reckless courage of the savages, nothing short of a timely rescue would save the defenders from death.

Then Mr. McKay found himself counting the number of days which had elapsed since the French schooner had exchanged signals with the island. Even allowing for light winds and calms she would have had time to reach some port, and, should the captain keep his word, a gunboat or at least a trading vessel might be on her way to the rescue.

Mr. McKay's thoughts were interrupted by a loud chorus of savage shouts at no great distance, then came the confused noise of scuffling feet tearing down the defile.

"Up with you," he shouted.

But the warning was unnecessary, for the three lads, awakened by the noise, were already standing to their arms.

"It's the sheep!" exclaimed Ellerton.

"The savages have frightened them, and they are running this way for shelter," said Andy. "That means that the natives will soon be at their heels."

The terrified sheep continued their flight till they found their advance checked by the barricade, and in a confused, struggling mass they herded into the corner

formed by the breastwork and the adjoining cliff, their loud baa-ing adding to the confusion.

Then upon the brow of the rise at the end of the defile appeared a multitude of lights, and with fierce shouts the savages tore down the rough inclined path straight for the barricade.

WITH FIERCE SHOUTS THE SAVAGES TORE DOWN THE PATH STRAIGHT FOR THE BARRICADE

To face page 228.

CHAPTER XXVI

A GREAT DISASTER

THE natives had furnished themselves with torches made from the branches of resinous trees, and in the ruddy flare the painted bodies of the warriors made an easy mark.

"Three hundred yards," said Mr. McKay, setting up the backsight of his rifle. "Fire rapidly, but aim low. We may check the rush before they come to close quarters."

The sharp reports of the rifles echoed along the rocky walls of the defile, and a series of loud shrieks told that the fire had not been in vain. Yet the onward rush was apparently unchecked, for though several of the torches were extinguished, the savages still rushed to the attack.

"Where's the searchlight?" muttered Mr. McKay, as he thrust a fresh clip of cartridges into his magazine.

At that moment the giant beam swung majestically round and fixed itself upon the gorge.

Under the powerful rays the scene of horror was thrown into high relief. The upper part of the defile was literally choked with human beings. A few of the foremost warriors, drawing clear of the press, had managed to evade the death-dealing volleys, and with brandished clubs and spears were rushing upon the barricade.

This much the defenders saw as the first flash of the

searchlight was thrown upon the scene. The next instant the shouts of triumph and pain gave place to cries of terror.

The blinding rays, coming apparently from out of the earth, were far more to be feared than the bullets. To the savage mind it was magic—black magic.

The warlike mob seemed to melt away. Some of the warriors, throwing down their weapons, rushed from the scene of action with their arms pressed tightly across their eyes as if to shut out the penetrating beams; others dropped where they stood, grovelling in the dust and uttering cries, while in the space of five minutes the defile was deserted, save by the dead and wounded and a few of the natives, whose terror seemed to have rooted them to the earth.

"That's spotted them!" exclaimed Andy, as he threw down his over-heated rifle. "I hope it will scare them right off the island."

"It has worked wonders," assented Mr. McKay. "But be careful, some of those men are not dead, I feel sure. Bring down every man you see moving."

Rifle on shoulder the lads waited. They quite realised the danger of allowing the natives to lurk in the defile, and as each cautiously moving body could be seen, as a terrified warrior slowly recovered from his panic, a carefully aimed shot caused him to fall.

"We are comparatively secure till daylight," said Mr. McKay. "They've had another lesson. Andy, you might relieve Terence at the searchlight. Keep it fixed on the defile, though at intervals you might direct it seawards. Quexo, I want you to carry up as many pails of water as you can to Blight's cave. Ellerton, you're feeling fit, I hope? Will you keep a look-out, I am going to have forty winks."

It was an exaggerated "forty winks." Mr. McKay,

dead beat with his exertions, slept like a log till daybreak, Terence keeping him company.

Ellerton had meanwhile climbed over the stockade and succeeded in bringing back several of the terrified sheep, which throughout the night had been huddled together in helpless terror.

Beyond an occasional shot as a few of the wretched natives attempted to wriggle out of the death-trap, the rest of the night had passed without further disturbance ; but the dawn revealed a different state of affairs.

The discomfited savages were evidently built of stern stuff, for as soon as it was light, undaunted by their defeat in the hours of darkness, they took possession of the summit of the cliff overlooking the defenders' lines.

Standing on the very edge of the precipice, like bronzed statues, several of the chiefs surveyed the scene beneath them, till, having taken in all that they wanted, they withdrew to the main body of warriors.

Instantly the fierce shouts of the savages rent the air, and a shower of stones and throwing-spears was hurled upon the white men's defences.

The missiles rattled on the iron roof of the house and upon the top of the shelter over the searchlight ; but the defenders, safe within the covered-in barricade, were secure from the furious hail, though unable to reply by a single shot. Several of the sheep were transfixed by spears, each casualty being greeted with a hoarse roar of delight from the attackers.

Terence, however, who had returned to his post at the seaward side of the terrace, saw the possibility of the searchlight being damaged by stones, and, regardless of the danger, he rushed from his shelter to place a screen of planks over the partially exposed instrument.

His appearance was the signal for a redoubled discharge of missiles, but coolly he continued his task.

"Get back to cover!" shouted Mr. McKay.

At that moment a stone caught the lad in the side, and staggering a few paces he fell.

A yell of triumph greeted the success of the savages; but without a moment's hesitation Ellerton rushed through the danger zone. Unscathed he gained his friend's side, and to his relief found that the missile had merely winded him.

Fortunately Terence had the presence of mind to stagger to the remote side of the searchlight hut, where the two lads were protected from the hailstorm of stones.

"Are you fit for a dash?" asked Ellerton after a while.

"Yes," replied Terence, "I'm ready now."

Seizing their rifles, the two friends rushed at top speed across the open ground and gained the shelter of the palisade guarding the cliff-path. Here they were, so to speak, on the wrong side of the fence, and had there been any savages on the shore their position would have been critical in the extreme.

As it was, they were able to keep up a constant fire upon the natives on the cliff; but their foes seemed totally indifferent to the rifles, though man after man was observed to fall.

The savages had not been idle. Realising that the buildings and the barricade at the end of the defile were proof against stones and spears, they rolled an enormous stone to the edge of the cliff with the intention of dropping it upon the roofed-in stockade.

"Look out!" shouted Ellerton. "There's a rock about to fall on your heads!"

Taking advantage of the warning shout, Mr. McKay, Quexo, and Andy crossed the covered way to the opposite side of the defile. Not a moment too soon.

In spite of a couple of successful shots by Ellerton,

who managed to bowl over one of the most active of the savages who were engaged in rolling the ponderous rock, the mass of stone rushed down the slope and shot clear of the cliff.

The next instant it crashed through the frail roof of the barricade, and, in addition, smashed a huge gap in the wall of packing-cases and chests.

"A near shave," ejaculated Mr. McKay. "If they keep that game up we shall soon be without a roof to our heads."

Emboldened by their success, a considerable number of the savages worked their way round to the head of the gorge with the intention of charging the shattered defences, the remaining natives still keeping up a telling discharge from the brink of the cliff.

"I must rush it," said Ellerton hurriedly, as he grasped the state of affairs. "Keep a good look-out along the shore, Terence. If I fall, don't attempt a rescue; there are not enough of us to throw ourselves away like that."

Bending low, the lad ran across the danger zone once more, and although several spears fell close to him, he gained the side of his companions in safety.

Seen by day, the advance of the savages had an even more fearful appearance than the night attack. Brandishing their weapons and uttering awful yells, they rushed down the gorge, with one object in view. They meant to come to hand-grips with the stubborn defenders of the barricade.

"Now, Andy," remarked Mr. McKay quietly, "reserve your fire till the thickest of the press passes yonder rock, then aim carefully at that canister. Go on firing, you," he added to the other two lads.

The execution caused by the three rifles amongst that solid pack of howling savages was great. No body of

white men would have faced it, but undaunted the warriors swept on.

Andy, finger on trigger, watched the advance till the critical moment; but his arm was not so firm as it ought to have been, and the bullet struck the rock a foot to the left of the tin of explosives.

"Miss, by Jove!" he exclaimed savagely as he jerked open the breach and ejected the empty cylinder.

Ere he could again take aim, Mr. McKay's rifle spoke. There was a blinding glare, followed by a deafening report, and the close ranks of the savages seemed to be swept aside as if by a gigantic flail. Not only did the dynamite charge scatter death amongst the natives, but the concussion brought down huge masses of rock from the cliffs, their fall adding to the terror and confusion of the attackers.

"That's fifty of them at the very least," exclaimed Andy. "A few more *coups* like that, and we'll wipe them all out."

"It will teach them caution, I'm afraid," was his father's reply. "But we've done very well up to the present. How's Terence?"

"He was only slightly hurt," replied Ellerton.

"No sign of any canoes?"

"No, sir."

"Thank Heaven for that," replied Mr. McKay fervently.

"The explosion also sent off the other canisters," observed Andy. "Shall we place some others in the gorge when it is dark?"

"I don't think they will attempt that way again," replied Mr. McKay. "They've had a rare fright, both by day and night."

"I noticed a crowd of them on the cliffs immediately above the cave where the rest of the dynamite is stored," said Ellerton. "If we can use the stuff to no better

purpose, why not set a time-fuse, and give them another surprise ? "

"It might be done, but there's a great risk to be run by whoever lights the fuse."

"I'm willing to do it," said Ellerton resolutely. "I can creep along the base of the cliff so as to be out of sight."

"Then do it, my boy. Now's the time to act, before they have got over their last reverse."

Without a moment's delay, Ellerton dashed across the spear-encumbered ground and gained the shelter of the overhanging cliffs. Then waving his hands to his companions, he disappeared from view.

There was a lull in the fighting. The defenders, anxiously awaiting their comrade's return, lay idle within their defences, while the natives were content to hurl an occasional spear or stone upon the roofs of the buildings to show that they were still determined to continue the attack.

"I hope Ellerton's all right," exclaimed Andy uneasily. "He's been gone quite long enough."

"I cannot help thinking the same," replied his father.

They waited another five minutes, then Quexo announced his intention of going to search for Massa El'ton.

"Be careful, then, Quexo," said Andy. "Remember Mr. Ellerton may have lit the fuse—set fire to great bang--up" he added, noting that the mulatto looked puzzled over the word "fuse."

"All right, Massa Andy. Quexo he mind take care ob self an' Massa El'ton."

Another five minutes passed in breathless suspense. What had happened ? Ellerton had only to cover a distance of about four hundred yards both ways. Allowing for the rugged nature of the ground, and the necessity for caution, he ought to have returned several minutes ago.

Perhaps he had stumbled and was lying helpless within a few feet of the heavily charged mine.

Suddenly two revolver shots rang out in quick succession, and Quexo's voiee was heard shouting for aid.

"Stay here, Andy," exelaimed his father hurriedly, and grasping his revolver he ran towards the seene of action, the report of another shot greeting his ears as he went.

On rounding a spur of the eliff, a strange sight met his gaze. From the summit of the eliff dangled a long rope of cocoa-fibre. Half-way from the ground was a native, evidently badly wounded, grasping the swaying rope with one hand while the other was pressed against his side. On the ground at about twelve feet from the end of the rope lay four bodies in a heap, and on arriving at the spot Mr. McKay diseovered to his eonsternation that two of the motionless forms were those of his companions.

Quexo lay uppermost, a jagged spear-head buried deep in his back. One hurried glance revealed the sad truth that the faithful mulatto was dead. Under him were the bodies of two natives, both shot through the ehest, while underneath the ghastly pile was Ellerton.

As Mr. MeKay stooped over the lad, a spear whizzed close to his ear and sank deeply in the ground. It was a stern warning, and Mr. MeKay took advantage of it. Lifting Ellerton's body, he bore it to the shelter of the eliffs, then as the rope began to tremble violently he stepped out a pace, revolver in hand.

He fired, and two bodies eame hurtling through space, striking the ground with a heavy thud. A lucky shot had severed the rope as eleanly as if by a knife.

There was no time to be lost. At any moment the min might be sprung. Hoisting Ellerton's body on his shoulder like a sack of flour, Mr. McKay began his retreat,

stepping over the rough ground with giant strides, till the shelter of the cliffs came to an end. Here he transferred his burden to his arms, and, protecting it as well as he was able with his own body, he dashed across the open.

Unscathed he reached the roofed-in stockade, and breathlessly he deposited the body of his comrade upon the ground.

"Dead?" asked Andy anxiously.

"No, only stunned. It's a bad business."

"And Quexo?"

"He's gone, poor fellow!"

"Oh!" Andy gasped, as if something had struck him; but the blow was a mental not a physical injury. "How——"

His words were interrupted by a roar that seemed to shake the island to its very foundations. The cliffs trembled, dislodging masses of loose rock, while a blast of air swept over the terrace like a tornado.

The mine had exploded!

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LAST STAND

The explosion, though terrific, had not the desired effect. Ellerton had succeeded in lighting the fuse, and was on his way back, when the natives lowered a rope from the cliffs. No doubt they had observed him on his way to the cave as he rather thoughtlessly showed himself in crossing the base of the projecting spur.

Cunningly two of the savages lowered themselves on to a ledge within twenty feet of the ground, and on Ellerton's return they hurled a stone with unerring aim, bringing him senseless to the ground.

Eager to secure his body, the two assailants descended the remaining distance, and were stooping over the prostrate youth when Quexo appeared on the scene.

A couple of well-directed shots settled their accounts; but the mulatto, in rushing to Ellerton's assistance, failed to notice that the edge of the cliff above him swarmed with natives.

Even as he bent over the bodies of Ellerton and his assailants, a spear thrown with terrible force struck him in the back. Hardly knowing what hurt him, the mulatto sprang to his feet, and with his dying strength discharged his revolver at one of the blacks who was descending the rope, ere he fell across the bodies of the victims of his first two shots.

This episode had caused the crowd of savages, who had previously been congregating immediately above the mine, to rush to that part of the cliff nearest to the scene of the tragedy, and thus the actual explosion did not inflict very great damage upon the invaders. Nevertheless the moral result was a good service to the sore-pressed white men, for the savages refrained from renewing the attack, and withdrew to the shelter of the palm-groves.

The approach of night also prolonged the mutual cessation of hostilities, for the natives dreaded the great flashing beams of light more than anything else.

Terence, in spite of himself, fell asleep several times beside the searchlight, while Andy, weary-eyed and stricken with grief, was kept awake solely by his devotion to his wounded comrade.

Fortunately Ellerton's injuries were not so bad as Mr. McKay had at first supposed. The missile had struck him a glancing blow, and although reducing him to insensibility, was more of the nature of a cut than a contusion. There had been a copious flow of blood which relieved the pressure on the scalp that a bruise would have otherwise caused.

Before midnight Ellerton had recovered sufficiently to relate the circumstances of the affair so far as he knew, although he was ignorant of the actual ambush. Neither did Mr. McKay think fit to tell him at present of Quexo's death in his heroic and successful attempt to save his master from mutilation.

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With the return of daylight the savages renewed the attack. Large stones, brought to the brink of the cliff by their stupendous efforts, came crashing down upon the frail defences, till only a small section of the

barricade midway between the walls of the defile remained intact.

Here Mr. McKay and Terence kept up a continuous but apparently ineffectual fire, while Ellerton, still weak and showing signs of light-headedness, did his best with a revolver.

Andy, nearly done up for want of rest, resumed his solitary vigil at the cliff path, occasionally adding to the fusillade whenever a group of natives appeared at the edge of the cliff to hurl another of the weighty missiles.

With parched lips and swollen eyes the weary little band continued the unequal combat, almost unable to raise their rifles to their aching shoulders, till, to add to their misfortunes, Andy perceived ten large canoes rounding the south-eastern promontory of the island.

The natives had at length grasped the importance of a simultaneous rear and frontal attack.

"We must retreat to Blight's cave," exclaimed Mr. McKay, when his son had shouted the disheartening intelligence. "Let us hope the explosion has not closed up the entrance. Pull yourself together, Hoppy! We've got to make a rush for it."

"I'm going to stay here—I'm quite comfortable where I am," replied Ellerton with astonishing determination.

"But you can't, man; you'll be cut to pieces in less than a minute."

But Ellerton refused to move. His comrades looked at each other anxiously. In ordinary circumstances it would have been no easy task to compel the lad to get up and walk, and with a few hundred savages hanging round, the difficulties were increased tenfold.

"I'll risk it," muttered Mr. McKay. "It's either kill or cure." And raising his voice he said: "Hoppy, old

man, Quexo is missing. He went to look for you and has not returned."

"What?" exclaimed Ellerton wildly. "Quexo missing? I'll go and look for him."

"We are all going," replied Mr. McKay. "Take your rifle and keep with us."

The savages saw the white men deserting the shelter of the barricade, and with shouts of triumph they redoubled the hail of missiles, while numbers of them rushed to the head of the defile and thence straight for the abandoned defences.

Edging cautiously along the base of the cliff, the forlorn little band continued its retreat till Ellerton, who was leading, came across the body of the faithful mulatto.

For a moment he gazed at the ghastly scene with drawn face and staring eyes; then, his scattered wits returning, he burst into tears.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. McKay to his son. "That's saved his reason. But here they come."

Already the leading pursuers were appearing on the edge of the cliff-path, while others, rushing down the gorge, had scrambled over the *débris* of the barricade, and with brandished clubs and spears were charging down upon their white foes.

"Pick him up, Hoppy; we must not leave him to those fiends," shouted Andy.

Assisted by Terence, Ellerton raised the body of the mulatto on his back, and, covered by Mr. McKay and Andy, continued the retreat.

As they reached the scene of the great explosion, they found that masses of dislodged boulders extended almost to the edge of the lower cliff. Slowly Ellerton and Terence bore their burden over the rough, rock-strewn ground, the savages meanwhile gaining upon them rapidly.

"Keep going at any cost," shouted Mr. McKay. "Gain the door of the fence, and look out for us. Andy, we must make a stand here."

"All right, pater," replied his son as he took cover behind a convenient mass of stones.

The two rifles opened a furious fire upon the advancing natives. Not a shot was thrown away, and although stones and spears whizzed over their heads or shattered themselves against the sheltering rock, father and son continued to blaze away coolly, and deliberately. The savages, now more or less contemptuously familiar with the white men's weapons, hesitated to close in upon the dauntless twain, and, shouting to their fellows to hasten to help them to wipe out the white men, they contented themselves with rushing to the right and left in the hope of surrounding their foes.

"Stop that chap!" yelled Andy, pointing to a crafty warrior, who was creeping on all fours up the rocks on Mr. McKay's left.

Barely two inches of the man's head were visible above the sheltering boulder, but those two inches were sufficient. Mr. McKay's rifle cracked, and the savage bounded a good three feet in the air to fall upon his face upon the ground.

"They're safe!" shouted Mr. McKay, giving a rapid glance in the direction of the iron fence. "Now, bolt for it!"

Springing over the remainder of the intervening boulders, father and son ran for shelter. For a brief instant the natives failed to understand that their foes were again in retreat; then, to the accompaniment of a flight of spears, they launched themselves over the latest line of defence and pressed home the pursuit.

Rifle in hand, Terence and Ellerton stood by the open

door to aid their comrades' retreat; another five yards, then comparative safely.

Suddenly Andy stumbled and fell headlong on the ground, his rifle flying from his grasp; the next instant half-a-dozen natives were upon him. Without a moment's hesitation, Mr. McKay faced about, and, drawing his revolver, fired.

At the first report one of the pursuers fell; but the hammer of the weapon clicked harmlessly as Mr. McKay attempted to bring down a second. The weapon was empty.

Throwing the now useless weapon straight into the face of one of the savages, Mr. McKay stooped to pick up his rifle, a spear just grazing his shoulder as he did so.

With the strength and fury of a Berserker, he gripped the rifle by the barrel, and wielding it like a ponderous flail he smote right and left.

At one moment the brass-bound butt crashed with a terrific lunge full in the tattooed face of a native; at the next it descended with relentless force upon the skull of another.

Then Ellerton's rifle cracked and Terence's revolver added to the din. The blacks seemed to melt away; and ere the main body of the pursuers could join in the struggle, the white men were safe within the stockade.

"Don't trouble about the door," shouted Mr. McKay, as Terence was about to close and barricade the iron-lined aperture.

Breathlessly the harried fugitives entered the cave, and, holding their rifles ready for instant use, awaited the arrival of their triumphant foes.

The door of the fence standing tantalisingly open served a better purpose than if it had been closed and barred. Had it been secured, the savages would soon have battered it in by sheer weight of numbers; but even

in the heat of the pursuit the natives paused and looked askance at the mute invitation to enter.

Fears of some other snare, more terrible than those they had already experienced, held them in a spell-bound grip.

The temporary check gave the defenders a chance of much-needed rest.

"Now, lads," exclaimed Mr. McKay, "we are safe enough for the present. A thousand of the wretches couldn't rush us in this place. But keep your eyes open, and let rip at the first chap who shows his head inside the door."

There was a touch of irony in Mr. McKay's advice. Want of sleep threatened to become a more dangerous foe than the savages themselves, and the lads were almost falling asleep as they awaited the next assault.

All at once Mr. McKay raised his rifle and fired.

A gaudily-decked warrior had so far overcome his fears and doubts as to peer cautiously into the inclosure. His curiosity led to his undoing, for, without knowing what struck him, he slid quietly to the ground with a bullet through his brain.

But the spell was broken, and with a hideous clamour the natives poured in through the doorway. Many fell dead or wounded, while others tripped over their prostrate bodies; but by sheer weight of numbers the fence was overthrown, and over the removed obstruction rushed the bloodthirsty mob.

Seeing that it was impossible to check the flowing tide of warriors as they sped over the broad expanse, the defenders hurriedly retired into the farthermost recesses of the cave. Here they were able to command the narrow entrance, and with a rapid magazine fire they simply mowed down every savage who showed himself at the mouth of the cave.

At last, disheartened by the obvious impossibility of rushing the desperate band of white men, the warriors retired, and silence reigned save for the moans of the wounded who littered the floor of the cavern.

Worn out as they were, the four defenders, as soon as possible, scooped out a shallow trench for the reception of the body of Quexo, who had been killed, and silently the earth was heaped over the still form of this their faithful servant and devoted comrade.

"Now turn in for a spell," said Mr. McKay, as the last offices were performed. "I'll take the first watch. I think I can keep awake for another couple of hours."

Vainly protesting, the lads obeyed and were soon asleep.

Shouldering his rifle, Mr. McKay walked as far as the overthrown fence, whence he could command a view of the house. Swarming in and out of the building were the natives bearing away everything of value, while others were demolishing the searchlight, which they evidently regarded as an evil spirit, whose powers were harmless by day. The work of plunder continued till nothing was left of the dwelling but the bare walls and roof, and presently the building burst into flames.

Hoping against hope, Mr. McKay watched with impotent rage the wanton destruction of the result of so many months of patient toil and energy.

Would the natives be content with their success, and re-embark with their booty? Already several of them, laden with spoil, were descending the cliff-path to their canoes; were the white men to be left unmolested?

Without thinking of the sore straits to which they would be reduced by the loss of their home with most of their stores, Mr. McKay waited and watched. The possibility of a fresh lease of life, even under such adverse

conditions, was infinitely preferable to having to fight desperately to the last.

But his hopes were doomed to failure.

A strong body of savages began to ascend the slope leading to the cave, and, to his consternation, the watcher perceived that many of them were bearing bundles of sticks and grass.

It was to be a struggle not only against the spears and clubs of the natives, but against fire and smoke, and Mr. McKay realised that the choice of the defenders lay between a fight to the death in the open or being stifled in the recesses of the cave.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE RESCUE

RETURNING to the cave, Mr. McKay awoke the lads and hurriedly explained the nature of the threatened attack.

"We must quit this shelter and keep in the open as long as we possibly can," said he. "A long-range fire may keep them at bay. Only as a last resource must we return to the cave."

Barely had the defenders left the cavern than they were assailed from above by a shower of stones and spears. Several of the savages had taken up a position on the summit of the cliff overhanging the mouth of the white men's retreat, so as to make the advance of the main body easier.

Thrown into confusion by this unlooked-for attack, the four defenders fled headlong for the cave they had just left, narrowly escaping the falling missiles. Then, finding that the jutting rocks protected them so long as they kept close to the base of the cliff, the wearied men plucked up courage, and opened fire upon the dense masses of the natives as they advanced rapidly with their burdens.

Many of the savages fell, but others immediately took up their loads, and working from cover to cover with admirable cunning the natives came within throwing distance of their spears.

The rifle-fire, hot as it was, was unable to stop the

fan-like formation of the crafty warriors, and, assailed by stones and spears, the defenders were once more compelled to retire to the cave.

Repeated repulses had taught the natives caution, and without risking themselves by appearing in front of the death-dealing tunnel, they thrust their bundles of wood and grass into the mouth of the cave by means of long poles. Then a torch was flung upon the heap of inflammable material, and the next instant it burst into flames.

"Throw some water on it," grasped Terence, as the heat began to take effect.

"Useless," replied Mr. McKay "It would only cause more smoke," and lifting a case of ammunition he rushed towards the blazing pile.

"Lie down!" he ordered sharply, as he regained his comrades.

Crouched in the remotest part of the cave, they awaited the explosion. Then with a roar, followed by a series of minor reports, the cartridges exploded, filling the cave with pungent fumes.

As the last detonation ended, Mr. McKay leapt to his feet, and, revolver in hand, dashed through the scattered and still burning embers. His companions followed his example, and gained the open. Even as they drank in the deliciously cool air they were compelled to resume the unequal combat, though the savages, alarmed by the explosion and the sudden appearance of their foes, gave back in terror.

Edging along the base of the cliff, for the darts and stones still descended, regardless of friend or foe, the defenders blazed away at their enemies, till the latter recovered from their fright and returned to the attack.

Not till they were in grave danger of being cut off did Mr. McKay and his companions return to the cave

once more to endure the torments of the smoke-laden atmosphere.

This time the savages did not leave them in peace. With poised weapons the wily warriors waited on either side of the entrance, while others descended from the terrace and procured fresh fuel.

Splashing their faces with water, and fanning the noxious fumes with portions of their clothes, the defenders strove to cool their parched and heated bodies, realising that another half-hour would doubtless see the end of the unequal struggle.

"I'm not going to be smoked out like a rat in a hole," exclaimed Ellerton. "I'll make a dash for it and die in the open."

"It's the only way," replied Mr. McKay. "If we are to die we must die like Britons, fighting to the last."

Hardly had the forlorn party made this desperate decision, when a sharp ear-splitting explosion, followed almost immediately by another, was heard without the cave. Yells of terror and noisy surprise arose, and the savages fled right and left.

For a moment the defenders were unable to grasp the meaning of the interruption, till Andy shouted: "Hurrah! A rescue!" and overcome by mental and bodily strain, he fell on the floor in a swoon.

Terence and Ellerton were about to rush to the mouth of the cave, but Mr. McKay restrained them.

"Lie down!" he exclaimed. "They're firing with shell, and we shall be blown to atoms if we go outside."

It was, to a certain extent, unfortunate that the inhabitants of McKay's Island were unable to observe the means by which they were so opportunely rescued from what appeared to be a terrible and remorseless fate.

While the preparations for the smoking-out of the

still-resisting white men were in progress, H.M.S. *Blazer* was steaming straight for the island.

Unnoticed by the natives, she gained the entrance to the lagoon, the leadsmen in the chains, and the decks cleared for action.

The alert commander had already observed the smouldering ruins of what was obviously at no remote time a civilised settlement, and the shouts of the desperate savages told him that resistance was still being made.

H.M.S. *Blazer* was but a third-class cruiser, mainly engaged in surveying duties in the Pacific. Her armament consisted of two 4·7-inch guns, one mounted fore and aft, six twelve-pounders, and ten Maxims, and these were amply sufficient for the work in hand.

Rounding to in seven fathoms, and less than three hundred yards from the scene of the desperate encounter, the *Blazer* opened fire. Her commander had noted the actual locality of the defenders' retreat, and carefully avoiding the spot for fear of harming friend as well as foe, he had a couple of shells planted in the fringe of the attacking natives.

Those two shells were sufficient. Madly the survivors fled along the terrace in the direction of the defile leading to the interior, and as they ran they were subjected to a raking fire by the quick-firers and Maxims, till only a small remnant gained the shelter of the palm-groves.

"Man and arm boats!" came the order.

But ere the landing-party gained the shore, not a living savage was to be seen. Panic-stricken they fled to the far side of the island, where they embarked in their canoes.

"We're too late, it seems," remarked the lieutenant in charge, as he gazed upon the devastated scene.

"Those brutes were running from up yonder, sir," observed a petty-officer, pointing towards the upper

terrace. "Maybe there's someone up there among the rocks."

"Party, fall in!" ordered the officer, and giving the word to march, he led the way over the open ground, which was littered by the victims of the *Blazer's* fire.

"Strike me; wot's this?" ejeculated the petty-officer, as four battered specimens of humanity appeared above the crest of a rise of ground and floundered painfully towards their rescuers, who gave them a hearty cheer.

"We were certainly in the nick of time," remarked Commander Bulwark, as, five hours later, Mr. McKay and the three lads were seated in the *Blazer's* wardroom. "We received a telegraphic message from Tahiti while we were lying off Suva, to the effect that a French trader reported that she had communciated with British castaways; but was unable, owing to the high seas that were running, to render assistance. So we came at full speed, and, I am glad to say, with fortunate results. We are leaving here to-morrow for Sydney. I suppose you don't object to being landed there?"

"By no means," replied Mr. McKay. "I think we've had enough of the island to last us a lifetime."

In a few words Mr. McKay told the commander of the finding of the treasure, and how it was hidden under the floor of the house.

"Treasure, eh? Well, you're lucky in more than one way. There are plenty of islands in the Pacific where treasure is supposed to be hidden. We usually regard these stories as a myth, but you've evidently proved that such things do exist. Let me congratulate you once again. I'll send ashore at once."

Before nightfall the treasure chests were conveyed safely on board the cruiser.

The bluejackets also placed a pile of stones over the

grave of the brave mulatto, a simple inscription setting forth his name and the manner of his death; while for the benefit of possible future castaways, a paper giving particulars of the stores deposited in the treasure cave was placed in an air-tight case and lashed to a post in a conspicuous position on the shore.

Shortly after daybreak on the following day Mr. McKay and the three lads watched from the poop of the *Blazer* the rapidly receding land which for so many months had been their home; and in silence they stood gazing with wistful eyes till the summit of the peak of McKay's Island sank beneath the horizon.

THE END

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